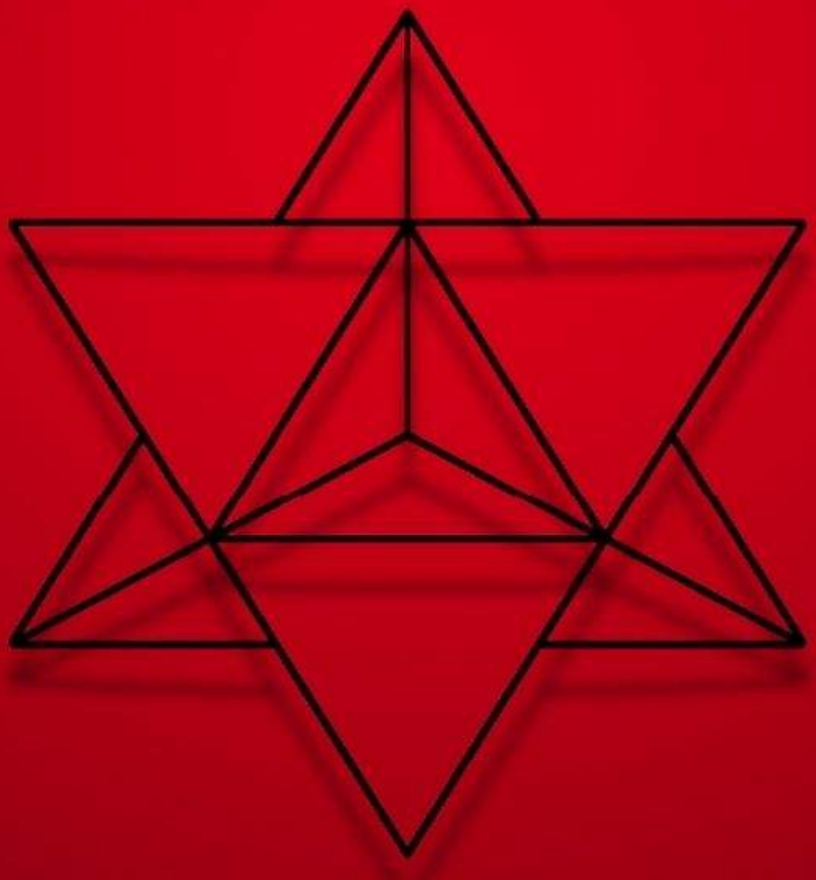
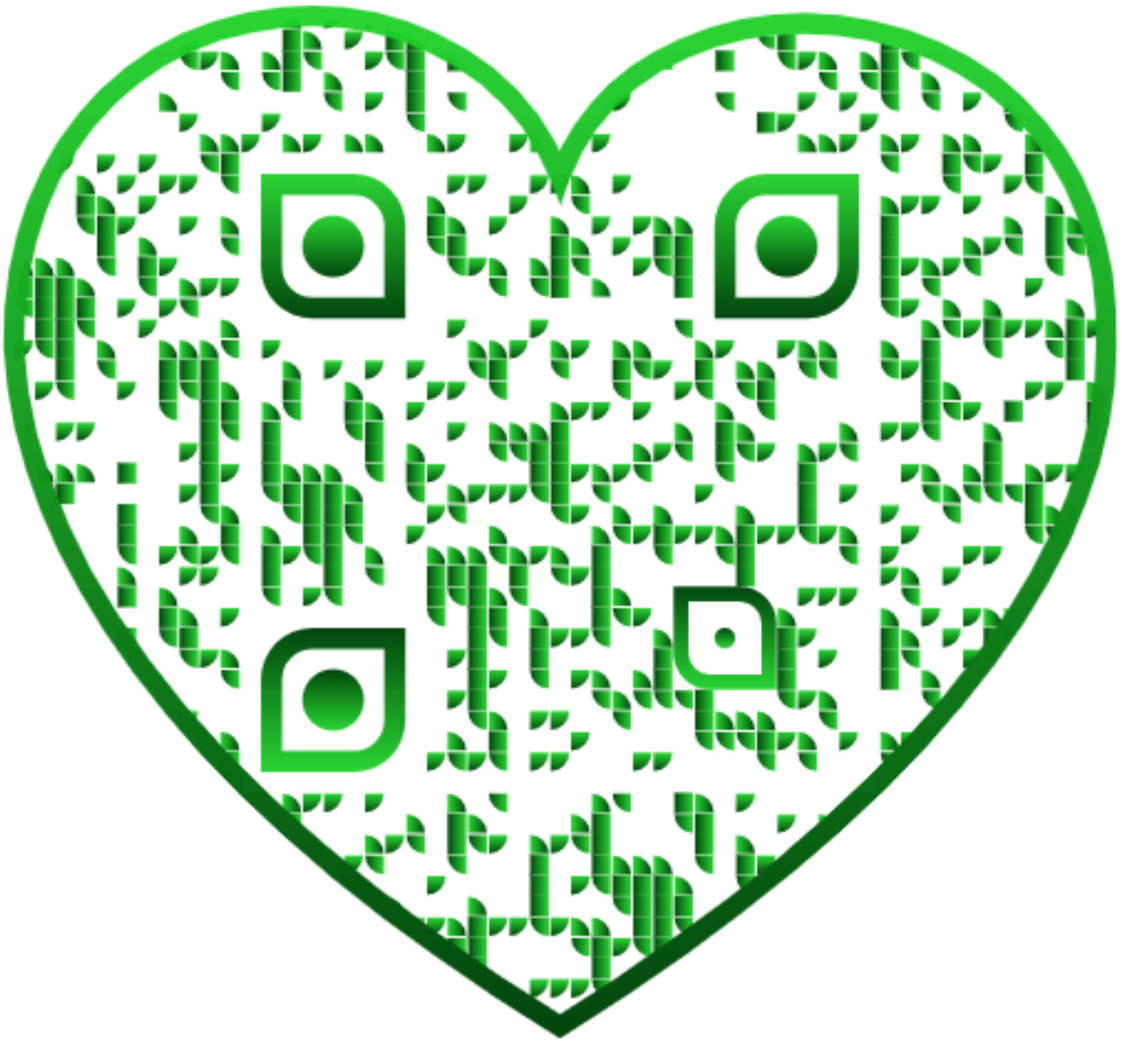
THE POWER OF DARK PSYCHOLOGY AND GASLIGHTING MANIPULATION



13 Mind Control Secrets that Control People's Thinking, Behavior, and Move the Masses. Only Used for Good.

HARVEY MIND



The Power of Dark Psychology and Gaslighting Manipulation

13 Mind Control Secrets that Control People's Thinking, Behavior, and Move the Masses. Only Used for Good.

HARVEY MIND

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INTRODUCTION

In power dynamics, dark psychology is defined as the use of psychological information, principles, strategies, and techniques in predatory ways that are harmful to the target of such practices.

There is growing interest in dark psychology around the web. Whether to protect themselves or harm others, everyone is trying to know how dark psychology techniques are used for manipulation, gaslighting, and mind control. Unfortunately, the internet is full of useless information, which doesn't offer people what they want to know. And that is why this book has been written.

The Power of Dark Psychology and Gaslighting Manipulation has been written as your one-stop guide on dark psychology and manipulation techniques. It specifically focuses on those commonly used to mind-control and brainwashes the masses.

This book goes in-depth into topics such as:

- Dark personality types
- The Dark Triad traits (and the fourth trait)
- How narcissists, Machiavellians, and psychopaths manipulate their victims and keep them in the cycle of abuse
- Gaslighting and other manipulative techniques commonly used by the dark triad personality types
- How you can master the art of persuasion to influence people
- Social media and its covert use of manipulative techniques
- Powerful techniques for reading and interpreting body language

You will find that this book offers much more than it promises. Suppose you want to learn the secrets of mind control used by big tech companies, advertisers, politicians, etc., to manipulate and influence the masses. In that case, this is the book for you.

The best thing about this book is that it offers more than just theoretical

information. You'll find an in-depth analysis of how manipulation and gaslighting techniques are applied in everyday life.

Are you ready to learn the best ways to protect yourself and your loved ones from this new world dictated by influence? Start reading now.

CHAPTER 1:
Personality Psychology Theories

At the basest level, personality can be described as “the characteristic patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that make an individual unique.” The belief is that personality develops from within and remains reasonably consistent throughout a person’s lifetime.

The American Psychological Association (APA) defines personality as “individual differences in characteristic patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving.”

Now, you may be wondering why we’re talking about personality. After all, this book is about dark psychology and manipulation. It is impossible to fully understand manipulators unless you first try to unravel what sums up their personality. To protect yourself from something, you must first understand it from the very roots.

That said, examples of a person’s personality can be found in how we describe their traits. For instance, “he is narcissistic, self-conceited, and a perfectionist” describes someone’s personality, and so is “she is loving, genuine, and fiercely loyal to her friends.”

The word “personality” originates from the Latin word *persona*, which describes theatrical masks used by performers to disguise themselves or project different identities during a play. Explaining personality requires focusing on a range of influences, from genetic predisposition to environmental factors and life experiences—all of these help shape personality.

Dark psychology techniques are widely and commonly used by individuals with specific personality types. Again, this is why you should strive to understand the concept of personality itself.

But what exactly makes up an individual’s personality? Traits, thinking patterns, and emotions play vital roles, and so do the fundamental features of personality.

- **Consistency:** Humans act in similar ways in different situations. Essentially, personality has a recognizable pattern and regularity to behavior.

- **Psychological and physiological :** Research shows that even though personality is a psychological construct, it is influenced by biological needs and processes.

- **Influences behavior and actions:** Not only does personality influence how we move and respond to the environment, but it also causes us to behave and act in specific ways.

- **Varying expressions:** Personality is expressed in thoughts, feelings, and behavior, as well as our relationships and social interactions.

Psychology explains personality through some theories. These theories are influenced by the different schools of thought in the field. Some of these theories focus on how personality is expressed, while others focus on how it develops.

What makes you who you are? What makes narcissistic individuals who they are? Several factors contribute to a person's childhood and upbringing, genetics and life experiences.

Your personality influences everything, from your way of living to your relationships. Personality psychology aims to understand how personality influences the way humans think and behave.

Psychologists examine how personality differs among people and how humans are similar. They also employ their understanding of personality to predict how people may respond to specific triggers or situations and their beliefs and values. They also use this knowledge to assess, diagnose, and treat personality disorders.

Let’s briefly discuss some of the most popular personality theories to help you understand how psychology researchers examine and assess personality.

Theories of Personality

As established, a few theories have been propounded to explain personality through two points of view: expression and development.

Many theories have been propounded to identify the critical attributes in personality and determine the number of personality traits. The first of these theories we'll be looking at is the "trait theories of personality." This group of theories proposes that personality comprises broad characteristics or dispositions.

One of the first psychology researchers to explain personality from the perspective of individual traits was Gordon Allport. He takes a dispositional perspective which suggests that traits exist in different kinds: common, central, and cardinal.

Common traits are those shared by most people within a particular culture. Central traits make up a person's personality. Cardinal traits are the dominant ones that an individual is primarily known for among everyone.

For example, if you're often described as "kind" or "generous" by people, that may be your cardinal trait. An excellent example is Mother Theresa, whose name is globally synonymous with altruism due to her charitable work.

Psychologist Raymond Cattell also viewed personality in terms of traits. But while Allport suggested that we had as many as 4 000 human traits, Cattell argued that there were 16. He also believed that these individual traits exist on a spectrum – we all possess every trait that exists in different degrees.

Eventually, psychologist Hans Eysenck narrowed down the complete list of traits to just three: extroversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism. Today, though, the most commonly accepted trait theory of personality is the "Big Five" theory. This theory proposes that personality comprises five comprehensive personality dimensions:

- Agreeableness
- Conscientiousness
- Extroversion
- Neuroticism
- Openness

The Big Five theory posits that each of the above traits exists on a broad continuum. A person's personality will typically fall somewhere on the

spectrum of each trait. In other words, you possess all five of these traits in varying degrees.

For example, you might be low in extroversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness but somewhere in the middle for neuroticism and openness.

Sigmund Freud's psychosexual development theory is one of the most popular yet controversial personality theories. This theory focuses on how personality develops and changes throughout a person's lifetime.

According to Freud, children go through different stages of personality development. A child's libidinal energy – which drives all behaviors – focuses on specific erogenous zones at each stage. To move into the next stage of development, a person must complete the previous stage. Failure to complete any stage leads to fixation, which impacts a child's personality as an adult.

Another psychologist, Erik Erikson, stated eight psychosocial phases in life. According to Erikson's theory, each stage plays a vital role in developing an individual's personality and psychological skills.

Humans face a developmental crisis that turns around their development at each psychosocial stage. Successful completion of each stage is how humans develop a healthy personality. Unlike Freud, Erikson was interested in how social interactions contributed to personality development. He primarily focused on what he called "ego identity."

Whereas Freud believed that personality primarily forms and becomes set in stone in childhood, Erikson believed that personality development progresses throughout a person's lifetime.

Studies on the impact of personality give fascinating insights into how an individual's personality can change and develop throughout life. These studies also have significant practical applications in the real world.

For example, you can use a personality test (also called a personality assessment) to learn more about yourself, your preferences, weaknesses, and strengths. You can also use it to learn more about others.

Most personality assessments look at how people rank on the earlier-mentioned Big Five traits. Some assessments give insight into how

personality might affect several aspects of a person's life, including relationships, career, personal growth, and others. Other assessments consider how certain aspects of an individual's personality might change over time.

Personality type can help determine what career an individual might enjoy, their level of performance in specific job roles, or what form of psychotherapy could be most effective for their psychological wellbeing.

For example, narcissists typically seek out job roles that allow them to be at the center of the spotlight.

The Big Five Personality Traits

Contemporary personality psychologists use the "Big 5" traits to measure the basic dimensions of personality. As earlier mentioned, these are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness, and neuroticism. These are broad categories of personality traits. But while a significant body of literature supports this model of explaining personality, not all researchers agree on the labels for each trait.

It is crucial to note that each dimension represents a range between two extreme ends of a spectrum. The average person lies between two extreme ends of each "Big 5" trait. For instance, extraversion signifies a continuum between extreme extraversion and extreme introversion.

You might find it easier to remember the five dimensions using the OCEAN acronym (for openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) or CANOE (for conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness, and extraversion).

Conscientiousness

Common characteristics of this trait include thoughtfulness, excellent impulse control, and goal-oriented behaviors. Individuals who are high in conscientiousness are often organized and detail-oriented. They typically plan, reflect on how their behavior affects others, and stick to deadlines. People low in this trait tend to dislike structure and schedules.

Agreeableness

This trait is marked by altruism, affection, kindness, trust, and similarly

prosocial behaviors. Highly agreeable individuals are usually more cooperative, whereas those low in the trait tend to be competitive and manipulative.

Neuroticism

Neuroticism is characterized by emotional instability, sadness, and constant mood swings. Highly neurotic people tend to experience irritability, anxiety, and moodiness. In contrast, those low in neuroticism are typically more stable and resilient.

Openness

Individuals high in openness tend to be curious about their environment, other people, and the world. They are typically interested in many things and willing to enjoy new experiences. This trait is marked by characteristics such as insight and imagination.

An individual who is high in this trait will be creative and adventurous. In contrast, someone low in the trait may find abstract thinking challenging.

Extraversion

Sometimes called extroversion, extraversion as a trait is marked by sociability, assertiveness, talkativeness, excitability, and high levels of emotional expressiveness. Individuals who are high in extraversion tend to be outgoing and social situations energize them. Spending time in the company of other people excites and energizes them.

Individuals who are low in extraversion are introverted, meaning they don’t enjoy social settings that much. They are reserved; therefore, social situations can be draining for them. They usually need regular periods of solitude to “recharge” their social batteries.

Based on research, the big five traits are both universal and biological. A study that involved people from over 50 cultures found that these five traits could be used to describe personality accurately.

Due to this, contemporary psychologists now believe that the traits also have biological origins. According to psychologist David Buss, there is an evolutionary explanation for the big five, suggesting that they represent the

essential qualities that shape the social landscape.

Furthermore, research suggests that biological and environmental factors shape our personalities. Nature and nurture both play a vital role in developing these personality traits. Although they often decrease or increase as a person gets older, the five traits stay pretty consistent in adulthood.

Personality psychology may be a fascinating field, but there is a dark side to it. We have all met “bad” people. You probably meet one or more regularly on your commute or at your workplace.

What makes a person “bad?” The answer to that is obvious – personality. Most people view psychology positively, which is generally a good thing. However, we mustn’t fail to acknowledge the not-so-good aspect of psychology, especially personality.

Some of the things we talk about in psychology can be employed negatively. We refer to this as “dark psychology,” a mental construct about the inclination of individuals with specific personality types to exploit others.

Everyone has that tendency to prey upon others. After all, we were once hunters and gatherers. However, this predatory drive is typically prominent in some people more than others. Humans generally strive to be “good,” An environment or system with law and order helps keep that part of us in check.

Still, some people don’t care enough to control their urges or restrain themselves from acting on their pathological tendencies. Of course, this is no fault of theirs – it’s all based on personality traits. Regardless, you should know as much as possible about these categories of the human race to protect yourself accordingly.

We’ve had records of individuals who behave ruthlessly, selfishly, and sometimes maliciously throughout history. Dark psychology helps you understand the thinking patterns, emotions, and motivations that lead to dark traits in people.

In general, psychology recognizes nine dark traits – but experts collectively refer to the three most popular dark traits as the “Dark Triad.” You may be familiar with some of these traits, but you probably have misconceptions about them like most people seem to do. Well, don’t worry about that if you indeed do.

The next chapter will look extensively at what psychologists call “D” – the dark core of personality. “D” is the key to understanding how personality can be dark. It is the common denominator among the nine dark personality traits. Therefore, we will also talk about the dark traits, particularly the Dark Triad.

Before moving on to the next chapter, here’s a quick “D” test you can come back to when you’re done with the next chapter.

“D” Dark Core of Personality Test

To determine whether you fall under the dark personality category, here’s a test to help you ascertain your place on the continuum of the Big Five traits. Answer these questions by choosing the option that best applies to you.

1. I am the life of the party

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

2. I have no reason to feel concerned for others

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

3. I am prepared at all times

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

4. I am easily stressed out

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

5. I have an impeccable command of language

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

6. I rarely talk

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

7. I am interested in people

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

8. I leave my possessions with people

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree

- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

9. I am always relaxed

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

10. I find it difficult to grasp abstract concepts

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

11. I feel unrelaxed around people

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

12. I enjoy taunting people

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

13. I am attentive to details

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

14. I worry a lot

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

15. I have an explicit imagination

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

16. I prefer to stay away from the background

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

17. I put myself in others' shoes

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree

- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

18. I am unorganized

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

19. I rarely feel blue

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

20. Abstract ideas bore me

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

21. I am nice to people

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

22. I like to start conversations

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

23. I have no interest in people's problems

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

24. I do things meticulously

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

25. I don't waste time

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

26. I get disturbed easily

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree

- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

27. I have great ideas

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

28. I have very little to contribute

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

29. I forget to return things to their place properly

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

30. I am easily upset

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

31. I am not good with imagination

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

32. I talk to different people when I am at a party

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

33. I have no interest in what people say

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

34. I like being organized

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

35. I experience mood changes a lot

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree

- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

36. I understand things quickly

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

37. I believe people don’t care about one another

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

38. I believe lies can help me get ahead

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

39. I believe everyone would hurt each other if they had the chance

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

40. I believe people who share their secrets are unwise

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

41. I am more deserving than others

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

42. I deserve a better life than I currently have

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

43. I imagine having extraordinary prestige

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

44. People think I’m highly worthy of adoration

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree

- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

45. Stupid people deserve whatever comes their way

- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Neutral
- Slightly Agree
- Agree

These questions can help ascertain whether you have any dark triad traits.

If most of your answers fall under “disagree” or “slightly disagree,” then you’re on the low end of the dark triad spectrum. This means that you aren’t necessarily narcissistic, Machiavellian, or psychopathic.

Answers that fall under “neutral” mean you may be somewhere in the middle of the “D” spectrum.

“Slightly agree” and “agree” indicates a high predisposition to the dark triad traits as a result of the dominant presence of “D.”

Remember that this test isn’t a definitive measure of the dark triad traits. Rather, the purpose is to help you determine the level of “D” in your personality.

CHAPTER 2:

Dark Core of Personality: Understanding the Dark Triad and the Other Dark Traits

Many people can be challenging to deal with because of their personalities. Unethical and harmful behaviors are often associated with dark traits or dark personalities. So, what are these dark personalities? In psychology, there are names for the different dark tendencies in humans. These names exist in our everyday language as well.

Humans can be vile, volatile, overbearing, or boastful. Usually, with careful management, an individual with these traits can learn to develop their traits and change their behavior to encourage harmony in their relationships.

However, some other personality traits and behaviors can be incredibly damaging. Often, we read stories or watch movies with fictional monsters – such as King Kong, Godzilla, Green Goblin, etc. But in reality, some humans are the real monsters who hurt other humans the most.

Dark personalities (or traits), often referred to as the Dark Triad, comprise narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism. They are sometimes called the "Dark Tetrad," including sadism.

When you hear of the "Dark Triad," the first thing that probably comes to mind is the title of an R-rated horror movie or video game. However, it is the term used to refer to this combination of three disturbing and malevolent personality subtypes.

This chapter will discuss the dark triad: what it means, the signs of these personality subtypes, and why people with these traits are dangerous to you and others.

Detailed descriptions and explanations of these dark personality subtypes will be provided within the scope of this book, but in short:

- Narcissists are entitled, arrogant, and attention-seeking.
- Psychopaths are callous and unfeeling.
- Machiavellians are dishonest and deceptive.

- Sadists are cruel – in every sense of the word.

Sadists and psychopaths are often confused, but there are vital differences. Whereas psychopaths use cruelty as a means to an end, sadists take joy in being cruel.

Based on research, these dark traits have a common core – the Dark Factor of Personality (D). "D" may be described as "a general tendency to maximize one's utility – disregarding, accepting, or malevolently provoking disutility for others – accompanied by beliefs that serve as justifications."

Clinical psychologists view the above traits and behaviors (grandiosity, cruelty, deceptiveness) from a clinical point of view. In short, they consider their symptoms of psychopathology and mental illness.

In clinical psychology, these socially aversive pathologies are called personality disorders. Examples include Narcissistic Personality Disorder (narcissism) and Antisocial Personality Disorder (psychopathy). Sometimes, psychologists include borderline personality disorder and paranoid personality disorder in this class of disorders.

Dark personality subtypes tend to have antagonistic tendencies. Many of these socially offensive tendencies are attributed to the trait domain of antagonism – used to describe behaviors that "put one at odd with other people." People high on antagonism are typically manipulative, exploitative, oppositional, deceptive, and suspicious.

However, dark personalities and socially aversive psychopathology do not always overlap. For instance, some dark traits such as moral disengagement and spitefulness don't seem conceptually related to psychopathology. Also, paranoid psychopathology isn't always labeled a dark trait, even though paranoia and mistrust are considered primary aspects of Machiavellians.

Nonetheless, the Dark Factor of personality (D) is at the core of dark personality subtypes and socially aversive psychopathology. These unpleasant personalities seem to have the following in common:

1. Overvaluing oneself

2. Devaluing others

3. Justifications for 1 and 2.

Therefore, the concept of value is key to the definition and understanding of D. Although there is nothing wrong with seeing oneself as valuable, it becomes problematic when one's self-valuation, self-esteem, and self-confidence come at the cost of ignoring or dismissing, or proactively devaluing others.

It is even worse when one subjectively justifies these views and behaviors – justifying one's mistreatment and abuse of others by thinking they are stupid, weak, effeminate, subhuman, malicious, etc.

The antagonism at the heart of the dark triad personalities causes significant distress and harm to/ those in their lives, including partners, parents, children, coworkers, etc., and anyone who regularly interacts with them.

Earlier, you learned that there are nine dark traits gene rally identified in psychology. These are:

- **Egoism**: is an excessive preoccupation with personal advantages at the expense of others and the community. Egoistic people believe that self-interest is above all else, no matter who or what is at stake.
- **Moral disengagement**: allows people to behave amorally and unethically without experiencing distress.
- **Machiavellianism**: is based on the belief that the ends justify the means, causing people to be manipulative, selfish, and insensitive.
- **Narcissism**: is an excessive preoccupation with oneself, a faux sense of superiority, and an extreme need for admiration and attention from others.
- **Psychopathy:** is characterized by impulsivity, a lack of empathy, and cruelty at the expense of others.
- **Sadism:** is characterized by a desire to cause physical or mental harm to others for the sole purpose of one's pleasure.
- **Psychological entitlement** is a deep-seated belief that one is better and superior to others and deserves better treatment.
- **Toxic self-interest:** is a desire to advance one's status – financial and social – at the expense of others.
- **Spitefulness is a willingness to harm and destroy others, even if one is harmed**.

As established, narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism (including sadism) are the most recognized of these dark traits – which is why they are called the Dark Triad (or Tetrad). About a century ago, Charles Spearman showed that individuals who score highly in one type of intelligence test are most likely to score high in other intelligence tests because intelligence has a general factor.

Similarly, the dark aspects of personality have a common factor: they are all expressions of a singular dispositional tendency. In short, the "D" factor is the dispositional tendency that expresses itself through the dark personality subtypes.

For instance, the D-factor can predominantly express itself as narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy, or any other dark traits in a given individual. It can also manifest as a combination of two or more of the nine dark traits.

But with how we map the common factor of various dark traits, you can determine that the individual has a high D-factor. As you know, "D" represents the tendency of an individual to engage in behaviors associated with any of these asocial traits.

This means that anyone who exhibits a particular malevolent behavior will likely engage in similar behaviors or activities. For example, someone who lies regularly has a higher likelihood of cheating.

The nine dark traits may share similarities, but they are by no means the same. Each trait manifests in specific kinds of behavior. But, at their core, they are more common than we realize.

The Dark Triad

The Dark Triad present themselves in different ways, even though they are similar yet distinct. Unless you're a trained psychologist, it's easy to misdiagnose one bad trait for another. And that could be dangerous for you – some traits are physically aggressive and potentially violent, while others are emotionally manipulative and abusive.

You will learn about the dark triad individually in the following three chapters. But before then, let's briefly talk about why these traits are so dangerous based on recent findings.

The first finding is that Machiavellians, also called high Machs, aren't necessarily as bright as portrayed. Before, it was believed that Machs – who have a penchant for being calculating, deceptive, and manipulative – are generally more intelligent than the other two traits. However, new research does not support this assumption.

Psychology researchers suggest that this disconnect is the consequence of an overly simplistic view of the trait itself. To further understand the relationship between Machiavellianism and cognitive prowess, let's look at the trait from five aspects:

- Antagonism: is the selfish, cruel, exploitative, and immodest tendencies that abound in people with high Mach traits.
- Agency: is the desire and expression of high ambition and power-striving. Machs are typically highly agentic.
- Planfulness: is a careful and detailed processing style typical to people with Machiavellian traits.
- Tactics: describe the tendencies towards exploitation and manipulation exhibited by Machiavellian personalities.
- Cynicism is the misanthropic approach toward humanity. Machs are typically high in cynicism.

After careful analysis of how each of the features above relates to cognitive intelligence, researchers found that "planfulness" is indicative of higher social-cognitive intelligence, whereas "antagonism" and "tactics" are predictive of lower social-cognitive intelligence.

New findings show that social media and dating apps have become a breeding ground for dark triad traits. A study conducted at Johannes Kepler University, Austria, found that individuals on social media and dating apps are more likely to possess narcissism, Machiavellianism, etc. They are also less likely to possess big five traits such as agreeableness or openness.

Recently, the journal *Personality and Individual Differences* published a study that suggests that narcissists prefer to pursue romantic relationships with other narcissists. Also, the popular misconception that narcissists generally have higher IQs than a new finding has disproved everybody else at the University of Warsaw. Narcissists are also more likely to consider

themselves more intelligent than others.

The question is, how common are these dark traits?

It's challenging to know the exact number of people who fit the description of a dark personality type, especially as these traits aren't officially recognized in the DSM-5. The closest diagnosis to these traits is antisocial personality disorder (ASPD), more closely linked to psychopathy.

Also called sociopathy, ASPD is a recognized mental disorder. Sociopathic people repeatedly flout rules and dismiss others' feelings. And like the dark triad traits, they lack empathy – and abound in aggression and hostility.

Those with the dark triad traits are often charming and charismatic. They excel at flattery and can make you feel special. A narcissist will make you feel like you're fortunate to be in their presence.

At the same time, these individuals have a hard time sustaining that façade. Eventually, they burn out relationships and exploit the people they should be close to.

Although the following chapters will talk separately about each trait, these behaviors can be predictive of people with dark triad personality subtypes.

- **An inability to sustain long-term bonds**

This does not only happen with romantic partners but also with family, friends, and coworkers. Individuals with dark traits often have a string of failed relationships that typically cut off significant people in their lives.

- **A tendency to identify as the "victim" in their relationships**

Machiavellians, psychopaths, and narcissists especially are masters in abuse and Gaslighting. There is what we call the narcissist cycle of abuse. When you challenge them about anything, they quickly make themselves the victim.

- **A lack of consistency in their stories**

The so-called facts and background information they offer about their lives usually become inconsistent. While they are skilled at manipulating facts, they can't sustain the veneer for too long. Things just don't add up.

- **Chronic needs to be fulfilled**

People with dark triad personalities have needs that they always seek to fulfill

at the expense of everyone else. Suppose you're in a relationship with one. In that case, you will always feel emotionally, physically, and financially depleted – because chances are they are manipulating and using you for their benefit.

It is difficult and dangerous to have a relationship – be it a friendship, a romantic affair, or a professional association – with someone who falls under a dark triad personality profile. These people are hardwired to take advantage and do so, no matter how you fight for them to change.

The dark traits that make up narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism are embedded deeply into the psyche. Thus, people with these traits are resistant to anything that could trigger a change. Sure, dark triad personality subtypes may be able to change, but the chances of that happening are pretty slim.

The next chapter focuses on narcissists and how they wield dark psychology techniques to keep their victims in abusive relationships.

CHAPTER 3:
How Narcissists use Dark Psychology Techniques

Narcissism may be defined as extreme self-preoccupation to the degree where a person is dismissive of the feelings and needs of people around them. While we all exhibit occasional narcissistic traits, true narcissists have a pattern of behavior and actions where they frequently disregard the needs and feelings of others. They are also utterly unaware of how their behavior affects other people.

As you've learned, narcissism is a dark triad trait – but it can also be part of a more prominent personality disorder. Not every narcissist will be diagnosed with Narcissistic Personality Disorder, as narcissism exists on a spectrum. Individuals who find themselves on the end of the spectrum are the ones who get classified as NPD. Still, others with narcissistic traits fall on the other end of the spectrum.

Narcissists are often charismatic and charming. They know how to build a façade so that their negative traits don't manifest right away, especially in new relationships. Those who exhibit narcissistic behavior tend to surround themselves with people who feed their egos. They form relationships to reinforce their beliefs about themselves, but these relationships are often superficial.

We have two different types of narcissists. Both types have similar traits but are informed by different childhood experiences. A person's type of narcissism also dictates how they behave in their relationships.

The first type is the grandiose narcissist. Individuals with grandiose narcissism were most likely raised to believe that they were superior to others. Often, the ridiculous expectations built in childhood follow them into adulthood. Grandiose narcissists tend to be elitist and boastful.

Grandiose narcissism is the most recognized type of narcissism. Suppose you're asked to describe a narcissist. In that case, chances are you will describe someone as egoistic and boastful – which is what sums up a grandiose narcissist.

Individuals with grandiose narcissism are typically dominant, aggressive, and self-important. They may appear to be self-confident, but that is a mask for their poor self-esteem. They are also generally insensitive.

The second type of narcissist is the vulnerable narcissist. Usually, vulnerable narcissism develops as a result of childhood neglect or abuse. Individuals who fall under this category are overly sensitive, so they use narcissistic behavior to hide their feelings of inadequacy. Even though they alternate between feeling superior and inferior to others, they feel anxious or offended when other people don't treat them as the "special" people they are.

Signs of Narcissism

Narcissism and Narcissistic Personality Disorder are still being extensively studied and explored by psychology researchers. Still, regardless of the type of narcissist a person is, common traits can be spotted in individuals with selfish behavior.

- **Sense of entitlement:** Narcissists believe that they are superior and above everyone else and, as such, deserve special treatment. They also believe that rules don't apply to them, and everyone should submit to their whims and caprices.

- **Need for attention and admiration:** One common sign of narcissistic traits is an unending need for constant praise and admiration and a need to always be in the spotlight. Those with this trait are fueled by validation from others and will go to any length to achieve this. They tend to exaggerate their status and accomplishments for praise and recognition. Narcissists need your attention and admiration to boost their ego.

- **Manipulative behavior:** Narcissists are manipulative and controlling. At the start of a new relationship, they will try to please and impress the other person. But eventually, they start to put their own needs first, even at the expense of others. They often create distance in their relationships as a way of maintaining control. They also don't mind exploiting others for their gain.

- **Insensitive:** Narcissistic individuals are low on empathy, making it difficult to empathize with other people's needs, wants, and feelings. This inability to empathize makes it hard for narcissists to take responsibility for their behavior and actions. Instead, they prefer to deflect and put the blame

on others.

How Narcissists Manipulate You

If you're in a relationship with a narcissist, then you should know that they think of you as a trophy under their power. Therefore, they expect deference and submissive behavior from you throughout the relationship.

Manipulation is a form of emotional abuse, and narcissistic people often resort to petty tactics if they're losing control over you. Some of the petty low tactics they use include:

- **Jealousy:** When a narcissist is afraid of you leaving them, they start to create situations that stir jealousy. They do this to take back the power and control in the relationship. Vulnerable narcissists may induce jealousy to test their relationship, take revenge on their partner, establish relationship security, or build self-esteem.
- **Guilt:** A narcissist will make you feel guilty about behaviors that they consider disrespectful or lacking in gratitude. As a manipulator, they have no qualms about twisting your words or actions in ways that would make you feel guilty about things that you ordinarily shouldn't feel bad about.
- **Threats:** If you begin to show signs of independence or behave contrarily to a narcissistic partner's expectations, they may threaten to abandon you and the relationship.

An intimate relationship with a narcissist is marked by an endless cycle of abuse. Narcissistic partners expect and demand admiration from their partners. They need every day to be a "praise fest." When they notice that your interest or enthusiasm for them diminishes, they go to desperate lengths to win back your affection.

They will do whatever to have you place them back on a pedestal, including buying expensive gifts or making over-the-top, romantic gestures. Minor things – like hanging out with friends, running late for dinner, or forgetting to wear the accessory they wanted you to wear – can drive a narcissistic partner into fear and anxiety.

Some narcissists are adept at winning other people's praise and affection. Still, they tend to have many broken relationships. They have a habit of

hooking prospective partners while being on the lookout for someone “bigger and better.” They live vicariously through the other person to make themselves feel “bigger and better.”

A narcissist will typically make their new conquest believe that they were the victim in past relationships. They like to embellish their good qualities while vilifying exes.

How do you know if someone you love is a narcissist? Or if someone with narcissistic traits is manipulating you?

Maybe you had a whirlwind romance, only to have your romantic partner bolt without warning. Or maybe you found out someone you consider a friend intentionally pitted you against another friend.

Naturally, you would feel devastated after an experience like this. And if you happen to be romantically involved with a narcissist, you will most likely feel this way.

Are narcissists the bad guy? The answer to this isn’t straightforward because their condition is complex. Narcissistic personality disorder is often stigmatized. Nonetheless, that doesn’t make it easier to deal with someone who has the condition.

The “whys” and “hows” of narcissism are complex and poorly understood. The trait itself manifests in different ways, which means every narcissistic individual does not have the same experiences or express their condition in the same way.

For instance, when you look at a narcissist, you may see someone with powerful self-esteem. But, beneath that air of superiority, what you have is someone who feels vulnerable and powerless. And as such, they seek external validation and higher status and are obsessed with being in control.

This often leads to the narcissist developing some elaborate self-defense mechanisms, such as the use of manipulation tactics. The low supply of empathy makes it difficult to become emotionally invested in another person, which again leads them to manipulate others without considering the consequences.

But low empathy isn’t a complete absence of empathy, so not all narcissists resort to using manipulation tactics against others.

For any narcissist, a relationship is all about getting their needs fulfilled. They believe that the only way to achieve this is to maintain control at all costs. They don't have much to fall back on if they cannot receive external validation.

So, a narcissistic partner will seek to hold the trump card in your relationship – even if it's at your expense.

One way narcissists do this is through psychological (mind) games. You have probably employed some of the tactics you're about to learn without realizing it. But of course, not everyone who plays mind games in their relationship is narcissistic.

The difference is that narcissists are consistent in playing these psychological games. Their behavior isn't rare or situational. That is how they function, no matter who they are in a relationship with.

Standard psychological games narcissists use to manipulate their partners include:

- **Gaslighting**

You're probably familiar with the word "gaslighting." It is one of the buzzwords regularly used on the internet, albeit wrongly. The core idea of gaslighting is that the aggressor tries to manipulate the other person into believing that they're losing their mind.

Gaslighting is a severe form of emotional manipulation where the gaslighter sows seeds of confusion into another person. The aim is to make the victim doubt their thoughts, feelings, and reality.

Narcissistic gaslighting happens gradually over a long-term period. A narcissistic lover may use it to keep their partner dependent on them. At the same time, they simultaneously maintain their control over the relationship.

For example, let's say you tell your boyfriend to bring you some tampons on their way home from work. When the time comes, he comes back with no tampon. And when you remind him about it, he says, "You never told me to get you anything. That's all in your head."

When this happens frequently, you may begin to doubt yourself and wonder why you have developed this habit of imagining things that never happened.

Gaslighting can have a massive impact on your self-esteem and mental health.

Other ways a narcissist might gaslight you include: “I did it for you,” “Nobody has ever loved you the way I do,” or “You’re too sensitive. You enjoy making a big deal out of nothing.”

- **Love bombing**

Have you ever had a relationship where it felt way too soon for an individual to love you? If yes, then it probably was way too soon. And it is also possible that you were love bombed.

Love bombing takes many forms, but it often involves a romantic partner pushing too far too soon. For example, it’s someone saying, “I’ve never met a girl like you before,” when they’ve only known you for three days.

A love bomber might regularly shower you with flowers, expensive gifts, fancy dates, and promises of together-forever. And it can manifest in extreme behaviors such as jealousy fits and stalking.

Being love-bombed can feel highly flattering. It compels you to respond to the romantic gestures affirmatively, even if it isn’t what you want. But before you do, think of two things.

First, look beyond the narcissist’s words and gestures and focus on what they’re basing all the love on. Second, ask yourself if the gestures make you feel increasingly committed or obligated to respond when you wouldn’t be interested otherwise.

Narcissists use love bombing to hunt attention and dependency from the person they’re romantically interested in. Once this is achieved and the relationship becomes severe, the love bomber will likely lose interest and, in most cases, exploit your feelings for them as an avenue for abuse.

Examples of love bombing by a narcissistic partner may include:

- Giving you obsessive attention and never taking no for an answer.
- Guilt-tripping you for not sharing their feelings or enthusiasm.
- Isolating you from friends, family, and other people in your life.
- Planning your future around their dreams and fantasies.

- Repeatedly making plans for both of you without informing you first.
- Demanding affection and attention from you in return for “giving you so much.”
- Proclaiming you as the love of their life or soulmate after only knowing you for a short period.

Narcissists find it difficult to form healthy attachments. That doesn’t mean they don’t enjoy romance or excitement. However, once the excitement wears off and they’ve “conquered” you, they typically want a new challenge or excitement.

What keeps a narcissist interested is the possibility of winning, which goes back to their need for attention and superiority. The narcissist in your life wants to feel like he can get you – because he has the upper hand.

But what happens once the excitement becomes stale? It’s typically ghosting.

- **Ghosting**

Ghosting is when someone you’re romantically or sexually involved with suddenly halts all forms of communication without warning. It can happen in any other relationship dynamic but is most common in romantic scenarios.

You’ve finally agreed on a relationship with this individual who has inundated you with gifts and attention for two to three weeks. And then, one day, out of nowhere, you check their Instagram profile and find that you’ve blocked them.

Frantically, you go on iMessage and try texting them – but you’re also blocked there. Mobile phone, work phone, Facebook profile, Twitter – all blocked. You wait for days to see if there has been a mistake, and they will reach out, but you get nothing.

You’ve been ghosted.

Ghosting is a power move frequently used by highly narcissistic individuals. There are several reasons why a seeming lover might ghost you. It may be because they no longer want the relationship and want to avoid telling you personally. It may be a test to see your reaction and how much you care.

For narcissists, it’s usually just another mind game – a break-up tactic – they use to remind you that they hold all the cards in the relationship.

It’s unlikely that a narcissistic partner will come back after ghosting. But they might if there’s something to benefit from it. Now, remember, not everyone who ghosts is a narcissist. Anyone in different circumstances can use this technique, and it’s not always a function of a mental health condition.

And usually, those who ghost due to a circumstance beyond their control are more likely to come back.

- **“Play the victim.”**

Narcissists are highly sensitive to criticism. They overreact to anything that doesn’t praise or shower admiration on them. Because it’s difficult for them to self-reflect, they resort to using subjective justifications when things don’t go their way.

This often means blaming others when their plan or life isn’t working out the way they anticipated. For example, they might justify their inability to complete a task by whining about a coworker that made the task more difficult than it should be – even if that isn’t necessarily true.

Either way, a narcissist will play the victim to justify their behavior or something entirely within their control. And then maybe the said coworker gets a promotion they were after. They might tell everyone else they achieved it by sleeping with the boss. After all, they deserved it more, according to them.

Deflecting the blame on somebody else feels better than accepting that the other person might have been more qualified for the promotion. Playing the victim in a romantic relationship may get the other person to back off – except they are narcissistic and problematic.

For example, your spouse gets 1really defensive after you remind them of the tampons they forgot to pick up on the way home. Then, they start accusing you of not caring whether they are exhausted. They might ask why it’s just impossible to come home to some quiet because you manage to ruin that every time.

Naturally, this would make you back off and leave them alone. Maybe you’ll dash to the store and get the tampons yourself. Mission accomplished.

- **Triangulation**

Triangulation is another tactic a narcissistic individual might use to maintain the upper hand in an intimate relationship. Triangulation involves getting a third person involved in the communications within your relationship.

Put simply; it is when you send messages via a third party or justify a behavior with “this person told me.”

Triangulation can take different forms. One common tactic is to get you jealous or to compete for the narcissist’s admiration and attention by frequently comparing you – directly or indirectly – to a third party, possibly an ex.

Another way is to use triangulation as a divide and conquer tactic. Say that you have two best friends, and one is jealous of the other. They may tell you, “I don’t know why, but Skylar said some mean and nasty things about you the other day. Of course, I defended you because we’re closer.” And then, they might go to Skylar and tell her the same thing about you.

Narcissistic triangulation is mostly about getting you in the middle of a conflict with another of your friends or known persons. Perhaps your girlfriend asks you to defend her publicly and guilt-trip you if you don’t. Maybe she tells you to intervene on her behalf to do something embarrassing for them to do.

- **Revenge**

If a narcissist feels they’ve been rejected, embarrassed, or wronged, it can trigger intense feelings of shame, humiliation, and eventually, rage. Psychologists refer to this as narcissistic rage or rage injury.

In many cases, an overwhelming sense of these negative feelings can provoke the narcissist to vindictiveness. Narcissistic rage may push them to launch an all-out campaign to “ruin” your public image, especially as they now think of you as the enemy.

Depending on how vindictive they feel, they might even create a long-term plan for getting revenge. Narcissistic revenge tactics can include slander, defamation, abuse, property destruction, and in extreme cases, aggression and physical violence.

To recap, narcissists use these manipulation games to maintain their sense of superiority and control in their relationships.

Have You Experienced Narcissistic Abuse?

The narcissistic manipulation tactics highlighted above can confuse you, make you question reality, and negatively impact your sense of self-esteem. Narcissistic victim syndrome describes the specific and typically severe effects of the narcissistic abuse cycle.

While it isn't recognized as a mental health condition, psychology experts agree that narcissistic abuse can take a toll on a victim's mental health. Keep in mind that narcissism and abuse aren't always linked. Many abusive people aren't necessarily narcissists. They can be psychopaths, Machiavellians, etc.

What are some signs that might suggest if you've experienced narcissistic abuse?

- You had a partner that seemed so perfect – at first. But suddenly, they became this person you can't even recognize.
- Nobody believes that abuse occurs because it is always so subtle and well disguised. Your loved ones might explain away the abuse with statements such as, "Are you sure you aren't exaggerating the situation?" or "I'm sure he didn't mean to hurt you. This is probably a misunderstanding."
- You feel isolated from friends and family. Suppose your loved ones don't understand when you explain the abuse to them. In that case, you're likely to feel alone – which makes you more vulnerable to further narcissistic abuse.
- You find it difficult to make decisions on your own. A pattern of criticism and devaluation from a narcissist in your life can leave you feeling sensitive and unconfident. It affects your self-esteem.
- You always feel like you're in the wrong when something happens. You feel the need to take responsibility for your actions and those of your partners.
- You have zero boundaries because it's so difficult to set any. When you manage to set some healthy boundaries, they are often disrespected by the abusive partner.

Everything explained so far in this chapter is to help you learn to identify narcissists before they charm their way into your life. And if you already unknowingly welcomed one, the information here should help you fish them

out.

Now that you know how to recognize narcissistic manipulation, how do you protect yourself? If you already have any relationship with a narcissist, what steps should you take to insulate yourself? More importantly, how do you ensure you don’t welcome more narcissistic and manipulative individuals into your life?

The answers to these questions and many more will be provided as you progress in the book. Let’s talk about Machiavellians – the individuals most notable for deception and ruthlessness.

CHAPTER 4:
Machiavellians: Masters of Manipulation and Gaslighting

Ever met someone who likes to scheme and plot? What about someone who thinks other people are a means to an end – the end being their advancement? Is someone manipulative and deceptive?

Whether it's someone you know directly or not, you're not entirely unfamiliar with these traits.

Philosopher and political adviser Niccolo Machiavelli wrote: "The Prince" – a manifesto of sorts that glamorized deception, cunning, and wickedness as more crucial to politics than virtue and morality. He wrote, "It is more important to be feared than loved." Thus, "Machiavellian" became a title for anyone scheming, cunning, and unscrupulous.

Then, in 1970, two psychologists – Richard Christie and Florence Geiss – recognized Machiavellianism as a personality trait marked by deceit, manipulation, and cynicism.

A Machiavellian personality subtype is calculating and manipulative. When they have a specific goal in mind, they think thoroughly about how they can achieve it, no matter whose feelings may be hurt in the process. They also manipulate others to achieve their goals and deceive and exploit them. Most people would describe them as cold and unemotional. Machiavellianism is more common in men, but anyone at any age can be a Mach.

Like narcissists, a Machiavellian personality is often charming and charismatic. You might find them endearing and engaging, yet you will probably never feel "close" to them. Again, they are lacking in empathy, just like narcissists.

But unlike a narcissist, a Mach will seek to achieve their goals without needing to be the center of attention. They pretend to be the puppeteer pulling the strings behind the scene rather than be the puppet on stage.

Machiavellianism is one of the dark triad traits, and some consider it the

deadliest of all three traits. All three dark personality subtypes have overlapping traits, among which are a blatant disregard for others' feelings and needs and reduced empathy.

People with the Machiavellian personality type are cold, calculating, and cynical. They exploit people for their benefit. They are inherently good at manipulating other people for their advantage and rarely care about the consequences of their actions.

The result of this is that Machs have shallow emotional experiences. Their capacity for emotional attachments is minimal, and even the relationships they form tend to be abusive and dysfunctional.

If a Mach can no longer benefit anything from you, they will walk away without giving it a second thought. Based on research, many Machiavellians seem to have alexithymia, which puts them out of touch with their emotions. In other words, they have trouble feeling emotions.

Because of the inability to feel emotions, they are also incapable of understanding others' feelings. Of course, this means they can't empathize with others, and they pay no attention to the effects of their actions on other people. Sometimes, this makes them appear amoral – which they can be.

Another hallmark of the Machiavellian personality type is the obsession with personal power. If a Mach thinks throwing you under this bus can help them advance their goal, they will do it. The most important thing to an individual with this personality type is persona fulfillment in the form of power, praise, or other forms of glory – as they like to call it.

Machiavellians are often willing to go to any length – including lying or manipulating other people – to meet their needs, without caring about rules, laws, morals, or hurt feelings. Usually, if someone tries to steal your meal, attack you physically, or burn down your home, you might react aggressively. That is no time to be nice – unless you're particular about keeping the peace.

In nature, we see a lot of kindness and nurturing, even among animals. However, animals still prey on other animals when it comes to survival, except they are herbivores.

Those who are Machiavellian, though, ascribe to this way of life – even in

situations that don’t threaten their survival, merely for their benefit.

Not all Machiavellian personalities are as brilliant as the media portrays them in movies and TV shows. Some are better at manipulating and exploiting others for their benefit than others. Some are simply not clever – just deceptive and callous. Successful Machiavellians find themselves up the corporate or political leaders, while the unsuccessful ones end up in jail or an early grave.

Being Machiavellian means neglecting to build healthy, cooperative relationships. As a result, Machs tend to have more enemies than friends. However, intelligent Machs know how to build that cooperation even with a façade.

The lack of success in some of Mach’s lives is tied to their tendency to think and plot without actually taking action. They don’t spend enough time doing the things that will help them achieve their goals.

Unlike a narcissist who will demand admiration and praise from others or a psychopath who might get aggressive or violent, a Machiavellian personality type might be more withdrawn. They spend most of their time plotting rather than throwing tantrums for attention or acting out.

Machiavellians in Relationships

You don’t need a psychologist to tell you if you’re dating a psychopath. The signs are always there because most psychopaths are aggressive and unstable in relationships. They also find it difficult to commit or show empathy – they can’t even fake it. You can hardly expect a psychopath to love anyone but themselves.

But when it comes to Machiavellianism, it can be much more difficult to detect. Some experts have argued that psychopathy often mutates into a more socially acceptable version in the form of Machiavellianism.

Given their natural tendency for manipulation, Machiavellians are not only dangerously charming but also charmingly dangerous. Research shows that Machiavellianism in men is linked to promiscuity and hostile sexual behavior, and other self-serving negative tactics such as cheating, assault, and even inducing intoxication for sex.

Machiavellians in the Workplace

Workplace bullying is more common than you probably realize. Victims face devastating consequences ranging from reduced job security and satisfaction to financial instability and PTSD, sleep deprivation, depression, chronic pain, anxiety, fibromyalgia, etc.

These ailments – both physical and mental – are usually absenteeism, an increased possibility of disability, and a significantly higher propensity to exit the workforce. Essentially, while they may be glamorized by Hollywood, bullies at work tend to lower the ability, drive, and quality to work for their coworkers.

When it comes to workplace bullying, research suggests that those most likely to exhibit behaviors that count as bullying are those clinicians call “the dark triad.” And the most likely of them to perpetuate this behavior is the Machiavellian. In short, the research literature has shown that Machiavellians are the greatest bullies of all.

Machs have an uncanny ability to influence and convince others of whatever they need to achieve a specific outcome. As mentioned earlier, Machs are motivated by power, money, and winning. They aren’t very particular about cooperation or community building. They are motivated by competition more than anything else, which manifests in their workplace attitude. Thus, you can see workplace bullying would come easily to the Machiavellians.

Let’s say, for example, that there is a newly opened promotional spot in the office. This spot is open to two colleagues whom the supervisor believes would be great for the job.

In this case, the Machiavellian has always maintained a cordial working relationship with his colleague, which isn’t surprising as a Mach will keep anyone close until they no longer have a use for them – after which they turn on them without empathy or remorse.

To win the promotional spot, the Mach might begin to steal their colleague’s idea, spread vile rumors about the colleague, or even physically harm the colleague to prevent them from getting the promotion. These scenarios fulfill motivational attributes that appeal to individuals high in Machiavellianism.

Although you (or any other person) would likely consider those actions

extreme and immoral, for the Mach, it's just a means to an end – so, essentially, the end justifies the means. Therefore, they do whatever they believe they have to do with zero emotional empathy.

Specifically, a Machiavellian will use flattery, deception, or even intimidation to achieve their goals within a work environment. If they need to, they can work well with colleagues and be friendly or charming. So, victims can find it hard to deal with the consequences of trusting a Mach at first, only to have them betray their trust in a vile and unexpected manner.

When dealing with Machiavellians in the workplace, the most important thing to know is that it's never personal, though the bullying may feel devastating and seemingly endless. It's not about you – the Mach would treat anyone else in your position the same way.

Accepting this simple but brutal fact can be difficult, especially if you've never dealt with any individual on the dark triad. However, it will help set reality straight and diminish the impact of the experience on the target of a Mach's abuse.

Because Machs thrive on climbing up the social or corporate ladder for power and materialism, the best step is to set up a work environment that is beneficial to both you and the Machiavellian individual. In essence, you should create a win-win scenario where it would be in the Mach's best interest to remain friendly and professional with you.

Another way to cope with Machs at work is to build a strong network of friends and loved ones who are familiar with your work ethic and achievements and maintain other interests with very little connection with your work.

The Machiavellian vs. the Narcissist

Machiavellians and narcissists share similar traits, so they both fall under the dark triad. They are manipulative, deceitful, and sorely lacking in empathy. Still, there are critical differences between both dark personalities. These lie in their capacity for long-term planning and strategizing, attitudes about human nature, morality, and the approach each takes to deception.

The Machiavellian is more strategic in meeting his self-serving goals, which

is evident in his long-term planning. Consistent with this, the Mach has better impulse control than the narcissist. Overall, the Mach is seemingly less emotional than the narcissist.

He is less likely to be distressed or outraged when denied something. There is nothing like the classic narcissistic rage which we discussed earlier. Conversely, a narcissist who's been emotionally injured is likely to exhibit sudden uncontrolled outbursts of rage or sullen withdrawal in the face of denial.

Another difference is that the Mach is more likely to break the rules and laws due to their cynicism and disregard for morality and humanity. The general Mach belief is that "everyone breaks the rules, so why not me?"

Often, the Mach will carefully weigh the consequences of their actions and determine whether it's worth the risk to break the law. They are rarely irrational, especially the knowledgeable ones.

On the other hand, the narcissist has a sense of right vs. wrong and will usually try to justify their behavior as moral. He does with subjective justifications such as, "I'm a better person than her," or "He's weak and effeminate anyway." The narcissist will avoid aggressive or criminal behavior to maintain that faux self-perceived superiority.

Machiavellians and narcissists differ in the nature and purpose of their deception. The narcissist tells lies and deceives just to get away with it. It is common for narcissists to lie for attention, admiration, or sympathy, even for a brief sense of victory and satisfaction. They feel empowered by their ability to con others.

In contrast, the Mach is purposeful with his lies and deceptions. He lies and deceives for political, financial, social, and other long-term gains. He does not want fame or attention, so he's usually subtler with his deception.

You can imagine how both personalities can be hurtful in personal relationships. Both are skilled at manipulating, exploiting, and deceiving.

So, how do you cope with a Machiavellian?

Again, you need to remind yourself that their behavior isn't about you, no matter how hurtful it is. Being in a relationship with an individual with a Machiavellian personality usually means not getting your needs met. It also

means being a victim of manipulative behavior, including gaslighting. This can make you lose confidence in your intuition. Regardless, remember that it isn’t about you.

You also have to prioritize self-care and self-compassion. Don’t wait on the Mach to meet your needs; do that yourself. At the same time, try to remain on good terms with them. Don’t attempt to play games or double-cross them. You cannot outplay a Machiavellian unless you are one yourself.

Also, don’t rely or trust on the Mach for anything. Past behavior is always an excellent predictor of future behavior. If you’ve seen a Mach manipulate other people, they will most likely try the same with you.

Suppose you’re in a relationship with a Machiavellian type. In that case, the best advice is to leave them and opt for someone who isn’t under the dark triad. The second-best advice is to establish clear and firm boundaries in the relationship if you cannot. That is unlikely to work out in the long term, but it’s worth a shot.

It’s possible to recognize Machiavellian traits in yourself as you read this. Try reaching out to a licensed therapist specializing in personality disorders if it bothers you. They can train you to develop healthy coping mechanisms.

CHAPTER 5:
How Psychopaths Employ Manipulation Tactics

Psychopaths are both fascinating and frightening, particularly the female ones. Yes, women can be psychopaths, too – and based on research, female psychopaths are just as dangerous as their male counterparts.

One defining trait of psychopathy is exploiting others through lies, deception, manipulation, and glib charm. If you've been taken advantage of by a psychopathic individual, you can be left reeling with hurt due to the feeling of being deceived and used. You might even feel a little foolish. "How could I not see her for who she is?"

There's a possibility that individuals high in psychopathy treat others with blatant disregard just for the fun of it or due to something they need from you. But there's also the possibility that they just can't help themselves because they are predisposed to this trait.

Psychopathic traits develop over a lifetime through habit and reinforcement, making it difficult for psychopaths to see the need to change their ways. In many cases, they are also built into the genes. In other words, psychopathy may be due to biological or environmental factors.

Are psychopaths born or made? This is one of the most commonly asked questions. And although the answer to this may appear to be simplified by the paragraph before this, it's not as simple as it seems.

There is intense controversy about how people within the antisocial personality spectrum are conceptualized. In the DSM-5, there are specific criteria for diagnosing antisocial personality disorder (ASPD), especially within the context of chronicity occurring since adolescence.

An individual must meet at least three of seven specific traits and show significant impairment in intrapersonal and interpersonal functioning to be clinically diagnosed with an antisocial personality disorder (psychopathy included).

The criteria for diagnosis highlight a pervasive and persistent disregard for social norms, morality, and the rights of feelings of others, as well as chronic

patterns of exploiting for personal gain, impulsivity in fulfilling gratification, and risk-taking.

Often, these behaviors include breaking laws and responding with aggression and violence and others that transgress norms of socially acceptable behavior.

However, labeling antisocial personality disorder as a mental illness allows for a “moral externalization of culpability” for a psychopath’s actions. This isn’t the focus of this chapter.

Nonetheless, the point is that whether psychopaths are self-made or born, you have a responsibility to protect yourself from them because they make up some of the worst kinds of humans you can ever meet.

Suppose you’ve ever had a psychopath exploit and take advantage of you. In that case, you’re likely familiar with their tendencies to act in self-interest, the lack of empathy, and the eagerness with which they exploit victims. Like most people, you would probably agree that psychopaths have no redeeming qualities.

Maybe you have a relative who appears to have no problem using you to their advantage. Or maybe it is a supervisor at work. In the case of a boss, this might involve forcing you to behave in ways that are inconsistent with the organization’s policies, telling you to get things done no matter who gets hurt or what the possible consequences are, etc. Your relative might be someone who brags about cheating the government on taxes or selling a counterfeit item at an auction for a cancer charity.

As you think about the behaviors associated with the potentially psychopathic individuals in your life, you will focus more on their undesirable qualities. You will find that they challenge your values in honesty, sincerity, and respect for the community.

This may push you to wonder at the possibility that not all psychopaths are all that bad. One stream of psychological research has suggested that psychopaths aren’t as evil as we’ve tried to portray them.

Of course, this causes one to wonder what the redeeming qualities of psychopaths are. Without bothering yourself, know and understand now that there isn’t a single benefit to psychopathy. So, don’t let that thought seduce you into giving the potential psychopath in your life a chance.

Understanding that the psychopath has no “mask” means that when you take steps to protect yourself who is spiteful and willing to act out against you, what you see is most likely what you’ll get. You really shouldn’t expect better. Also, be mindful that psychopaths are bold – meaning that they aren’t afraid to take decisive actions against you if they feel the need to.

A psychopath’s personality and behavior are paradoxical, almost bizarrely. Few understand the mind of a psychopath, seeing as it appears to defy human nature. On one hand, they make a convincing liar. On the other, they are blatantly frank and callous.

They could look you square in the face and say things deliberately mean and hurtful, then walk away with an air of victory at the offense. They may act sympathetic and sincere while promising to help you with a task – only to sabotage you at a moment’s notice, without offering even a poor excuse. Psychopaths may be industrious at accomplishing their goals, while they leave the most important tasks undone.

An individual who is high in psychopathy may experience exhilaration, a contemptuous thrill, at exploiting and deceiving other people. They are skilled at sizing people up and knowing the right buttons to press to set them off while scoring points for their amusement.

Contrary to what you may think, psychopaths rarely leave their kids out of their games and tactics. They cannot feel, so everything they do is second nature. When they intentionally disappoint, hurt, or harm others, it’s all for that exhilaration and the feeling of superiority. But the thrill is often short-lived. Afterward, psychopaths marvel at how stupid their victims are to fall for their schemes.

Fundamentally, psychopaths feel inadequate and compromised. They may fight to be the center of attention, particularly female psychopaths. In this way, they are similar to narcissists.

A psychopath will take advantage of social gatherings to court attention, milking everything for personal gain. They use other people to serve their selfish needs and desires and prey on them. They go through life, selecting who to use for what purpose and scheming on how to exploit them. Even “friends” aren’t exempted from the psychopath’s schemes.

Contrary to how they are sometimes portrayed in mainstream media, psychopaths aren't mentally incompetent. They are sane and do not suffer from any mental illness. Brain imaging shows no damage in the brains of psychopaths, just differences in brain structure.

The amygdala, an area of the brain associated with emotion, is tinier in a psychopath's brain. Conversely, brain imaging of highly empathetic, prosocial, and compassionate people shows that they have bigger amygdalas than the average person – the opposite of the psychopath's brain.

We still don't know why these people are different from the rest of us. But we do know that psychopathy is a defect and a disorder: something is missing. Since psychopaths are entirely rational, they know what they do. Not only that, but studies have also shown that their behavior is born of choice and free will.

Anyone who's ever been in proximity to a psychopath might have heard them say, "I feel empty." This feeling of emptiness is linked to a poor self-image, but its expression is usually transitory and ephemeral.

If you want to feel sorry for the psychopath, don't. They project a glib and convincing façade to conceal their predatory and calculating schemes. They will undercut you without a second thought, whether emotionally, verbally, psychologically, or physically.

No matter how wonderful they appear from a distance, you will always glimpse their devious behavior up close. Don't allow yourself to get too close because it might be too late before you realize it.

Devaluation: The Psychopath's Number One Tool

The psychopath's interactions with others are paradoxical. He needs people and will often shower them with affection. But she also gets pleasure in their devaluation. This tendency to devalue others may seem contradictory because, on the surface, he appears to like his victims. However, this isn't genuine affection or connectedness.

It is nothing but a consequence of the psychopath's pathological obsession with himself and his willingness to use other people to establish a false sense of self-worth. He uses that to counter his view of himself as a victim.

Psychopathic devaluation is akin to narcissistic abuse, but it takes different forms. Some of the forms it takes may not always be obvious, even to the most observant. It may be something as harmless as consistently taunting, slighting, or ignoring you. It may also be not keeping a promise to call you back or hanging up the phone in the middle of a conversation.

These actions would make you feel disappointed, which, in turn, makes the psychopath believe that he is in control. Upping the ante, a psychopathic individual may devalue you by spreading unpalatable rumors to discredit you – the goal is to ruin your reputation. In the most extreme cases, the devaluation may be as severe as physically assaulting the victim.

Psychopaths often take the "victim stance" even when they're the aggressor. When they speak, you might hear all about how they were deprived or cheated somehow. The purpose of this is to have people around to pretend to be social, comical, or even helpful.

Unsurprisingly, individuals high in psychopathy can command attention with their glib charm and charisma. But this is just the flip side of their strategy to elevate themselves by devaluing others.

Female psychopaths tend to devalue their children. They see the kids as objects or possessions to do as they wish. They have little regard for their children – often leading to neglect and abuse. A female psychopath may use, ignore, abuse, belittle, reproach, and demean her children.

A victim of psychopathic devaluation may not be aware when they are being devalued. The psychopath's charming exterior makes it easy to ignore subtle clues. Should you become suspicious of a psychopath's motives, be ready to have them "swear on dead mother's grave."

When the time comes when you no longer serve the psychopath's needs, you will be discarded. This can leave you with mixed feelings that are difficult to pinpoint or explain. The subtle clues often elude the victim because they don't want to accept that there's an entirely different person behind the mask.

Common Ways Psychopaths Manipulate Victims

Knowing and accepting that you're the victim of psychopathic manipulation is the first step toward breaking free of the psychopath's emotional trap. You

need to be able to see through the impression management techniques the psychopath use. That way, you can learn to say “NO” to their requests, no matter how simple and innocuous they may seem.

Research has shown us that psychopaths have no problem admitting to their manipulative tendencies when put in a research setting. But how can that honesty translate into habitual behavior when psychopathic individuals have a lot to gain from beguiling their victims?
Those high in psychopathy have some insight into their interpersonal and affective maladaptive traits.

This could mean that they don’t like themselves all that well. So, if you can get through the outer shell behind which they hide their true self, you may be able to maintain a reasonably healthy relationship, as impossible as that might seem.

However, breaking through a psychopath’s exterior requires you to know how they will try to manipulate you or any other potential victim.

In a study conducted by Texas A&M’s Shannon Kelley and co (2017), students at a college rated themselves and their roomies on a set of personality measures that briefly measured psychopathy through three constructs: boldness, meanness, and disinhibition.

Boldness might seem like an admirable trait, but it is measured as the tendency to dominate others and immunity to stress fearlessly. Meanness comprises components of callousness, cruelty, and sensation-seeking. Disinhibition includes impulsiveness, an inability to regulate emotions, and an unwillingness to take responsibility for one’s actions.

This study concluded that individuals high in psychopathy:

- Don’t think their traits are problematic. They don’t mind showing that they’re fearless, even if they come across as domineering or aggressive.
- Don’t care about the consequences of their actions for themselves or others. Those high in psychopathy traits may be aware that their behavior is undesirable but not particularly care about how they affect others.
- Try to dominate and push others around. You can sense this if you’re in the company of psychopathic people.

- Attribute their devious motivations to a higher purpose. This is similar to the subjective justifications used by narcissists. Psychopathic individuals believe that they aren't subject to the same concerns as other people. So, they give higher purposes to their actions.
- Pretend that they are sincere. They aren't predisposed to honesty, but psychopaths' self-distortions can delude them into thinking that they are. They sway their victims effortlessly with this high-mindedness.

And these are some of the ways that psychopaths manipulate their victims. Glibness, predisposition to antisocial behavior, and a lack of empathy are part of the picture of individuals high in psychopathy.

Even though psychopaths may see themselves honestly in the proper settings or circumstances, this doesn't mean they won't try to exploit and deceive you. Recognizing how they manipulate can help you build up resistance to their deception.

CHAPTER 6:
Sadism: The Fourth Trait of the Dark Tetrad

Negative behavior within a relationship can have varying causes – from the clinical to the situational. At the start of a relationship, red flags are typically filtered by rose-colored glasses, pushing us to excuse or explain away undesirable behavior.

We all misbehave occasionally – selfishness, insensitivity, and egocentricity are some of the behaviors often displayed within relationships. However, research has established a specific type of dark trait that misbehaves for no other reason than pleasure or enjoyment. That is the sadistic personality subtype.

Sadism isn't often mentioned as one of the dark triad traits, but it is one of the darkest personality types you'll ever encounter. And that is probably why psychology researchers are expanding the dark triad to include this trait – which makes the four personality subtypes the "dark tetrad."

For the average person, the word "sadist" stirs up images of villainous characters from horror thrillers and books, recognizable through their undeniably frightening appearance and despicable personality. But this media-inspired stereotype may cause you to overlook dangerous, everyday sadists in your own life.

You may hope that you don't know or come across such cruel and heartless people. But maybe you already do because these sadists walk among us. They can be in your school, workplace, or neighborhood.

Every day, you may meet them in the boardroom, the classroom, or over Zoom without realizing it. Many of these individuals seem friendly, pleasant, and charming at first, but only until you know them.

And because of the potential danger you may be in from befriending a sadist, you must learn how to recognize these wolves in their true colors and harmful emotional proclivities. That is the best way to defend yourself and even your loved ones.

Contrary to the belief of many people, sadism isn't just about sexual cruelty.

It goes beyond inflicting physical pain. As research shows, it involves deriving pleasure in hurting others, whether emotionally or physically.

Sadists are intrinsically motivated to cause harm or suffering to others, even if that comes at a personal cost. This is because, for them, cruelty brings pleasure. It is generally exciting, but it can also be sexually stimulating.

Studies show that sadism overlaps with the original members of the Dark Triad. Like narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism, sadism is characterized by manipulation, exploitation, disagreeableness, and self-centeredness.

As sadistic individuals form a relationship, they start by putting their best foot forward. In other words, they showcase their best traits and qualities. But as you become more intimate with them, you will find red flags that point to sadistic tendencies.

Some metrics that can be used to identify everyday sadism in people include bullying, vengefulness, weapon fascination, an obsession with violent video games, cyberstalking, toxic leadership, etc. The distinctive sign of sadism lies in the reward value, which is satisfied through the participation or observation of cruelty.

Now, you may wonder how sadists differ from psychopaths. The critical difference is that psychopaths are indifferent to the suffering of their victims, while sadists enjoy it. While a psychopath may use cruelty simply as an instrument, sadists find its intrinsic value enjoyable.

In a practical context, a positive emotional response to the pain or suffering of others should be an instant red flag. Yet, you may feel compelled to explain away or trivialize the severity of these counterintuitive reactions because of how difficult it is to understand. Thankfully, there are many other red flags you can watch out for.

Most people will encounter everyday sadists – people who actively try to cause us emotional pain. Given the overlap between sadism and the other dark triad traits, it’s crucial to learn how you can distinguish an everyday sadist (ES) from the others. The actions of an ES range from petty to extremely severe.

The *Fifty Shades of Grey* books and movies are most likely the average

person’s first vivid depiction of the form sadism takes in the bedroom. But what about the more pervasive, more mundane type of sadism?

How do you recognize the everyday sadism that takes a more benign form? Perhaps even you express this kind of sadism without knowing it. Maybe you enjoy the thrill of blasting videogame avatars to pieces.

Your favorite entertainment form is action movies where the characters have to battle each other to death. You may cheer for the playing teams at a Lacrosse game to engage in an aggressive and violent clashing of sticks and bodies against each other. You may not realize it, but in all of these scenarios, you’re taking pleasure from seemingly mundane experiences in which the pain (and cruelty) is vicarious.

Sadism doesn’t always manifest in the ways that we expect it to. A sadist on the low end of the spectrum may not necessarily seek to harm others for their pleasure. However, they may enjoy watching the person be harmed or hurt. Thus, you may be living with a sadist without realizing it.

The defining thing here is that the sadist is living vicariously through these ordinary, everyday experiences where cruelty or pain is indirectly caused.

A study was conducted in 2013 to find out if everyday sadists have a predilection for causing real, not just imagined, suffering to others. Researchers from the University of British Columbia, led by psychologist Erin Buckels believed that overt sadism could make a person much more aggressive than they usually are when triggered.

They also proposed that sadism can cause a predisposition to antisocial behavior that goes beyond even the malicious traits typically associated with narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. Simply put, sadists are inclined to be even more malicious than the personality types classified under the dark triad.

To investigate everyday sadism in a laboratory setting, they had to develop tasks that mimic the everyday casual harm-inflicting behavior everyone might perform daily. The chosen task needed to be something that doesn’t hurt people but is realistic and believable enough to produce the pleasure sadists need.

So, the team agreed on bug-killing. The argument was that the act of killing

bugs would satisfy the sadistic desire to inflict harm on a living creature through direct physical contact. To test the hypothesis, the team offered participants a range of undesirable tasks to choose from, in which bug-killing would be an alternative among a group of unpleasant, non-sadistic tasks.

The final three options were the potential “jobs” the participants could choose from – assisting someone in bug-killing, putting their hands in a bucket of ice-cold water, or cleaning dirty toilets. To identify the everyday sadists among the participants, the researchers used the Short Sadistic Impulse Scale (ISIS) developed by the University of College Cork psychologists in 2011.

Additionally, they administered dark triad questionnaires to tease out the individual contributions of sadism from the other three dark traits.

As you would expect, the individuals who scored highly on the sadism test were the most likely to choose to assist in killing bugs. After completing the task, the highly sadistic participants also reported enjoying the task the most – and those who had chosen different tasks appeared to regret not choosing the bug-killing task in the first place.

Then, those who scored highly in sadism were made to complete a second laboratory task. In this task, they were compared with participants who were less inclined to cruelty in a button-pushing competition. Participants were measured in their willingness to attack opponents who would not attack them back.

Throughout the experiment, participants had the chance to blast their opponents’ headphones with white noise for every campaign they won. Of course, there were no real opponents. Still, they believed that they had opponents that wouldn’t attack them back after being blasted in the ears.

This particular experiment aimed to examine whether those high in sadistic tendencies would agree to inflict the unpleasant stimulus on a non-attacking opponent. As it turned out, everyday sadists were quick to inflict harm on their opponents. And at the same time, they put in extra work to ensure they had the opportunity to blast their opponents more.

Here are ten questions from ISIS that you can use to determine who might be a sadist. Each question is rated as “describes” or “does not describe” the person in question.

- I enjoy seeing people hurt.
- I would enjoy harming someone physically, emotionally, or sexually.
- Hurting people would be stimulating.
- I have hurt people for my pleasure.
- People would enjoy hurting others if they simply gave it a try.
- I have fantasies that have to do with hurting people.
- I have physically, emotionally, or sexually hurt people because I could.
- I wouldn't intentionally cause harm to another person.
- I have humiliated people to keep them in line.
- Sometimes I feel so enraged I want to hurt others.

Common examples of how everyday sadism manifests in a person include:

- Intentionally revealing secrets, the everyday sadist promised to keep to themselves.
- Portraying a person in an unflattering light to damage their reputation and credibility.
- Jeopardizing someone's employment without probable cause.
- Trying to ruin someone else's relationship just for the "fun."
- Financial, physical, or intellectual theft of property.
- Intentionally marginalizing a colleague, family member, student, or classmate.
- Cyberstalking or other forms of bullying.

Everyday sadists are pretty skillful at orchestrating situations such as the ones above, and they often set these up in ways that help them avoid culpability. An individual with sadistic tendencies will never accept responsibility or feel remorse for hurting another person, no matter how severe the consequences.

Due to their glib charm, everyday sadists are usually famous, socially influential, or professionally successful. This further makes it difficult for the people in their lives to pay attention to the deliberate nature of their harmful actions.

Often, sadists seek to harm others simply because they feel envious or threatened or because it might benefit them in one way or another. They may also cause harm to targets they consider weak and unlikely to retaliate for no other reason than that.

In many cases, the victim finds it difficult to pinpoint the reason for the attack. Although it's easy to believe that everyday sadists are strangers and other people that we probably don't know too well, the fact is that an ES may very well be someone you're intimate with or know reasonably well.

Some Examples of Everyday Sadism

Example 1:

"Daniel" developed significant anxiety when he got fired from his job, and finding a new one proved more difficult than he expected. So, he sought the support of his brother "Joe." He talked to Joe about his anxiety and asked him not to disclose it to anyone else; Joe agreed.

Two weeks later, Joe invites Daniel to "a casual family barbeque" with some friends and family members. Daniel found out that the "casual barbeque" was a full-blown party to separate Joe's new promotion at work on getting to the location. Of course, he was visibly surprised and uncomfortable.

He was even more stunned and anxious when the other guests condoled him on losing his job. After the party, Daniel raised the issue with Joe, but the latter denied talking to anyone about his job loss. He further said that he didn't expect Daniel to feel uncomfortable or embarrassed for being invited to the party.

Daniel felt bad for assuming the worst about his brother, but he couldn't get past his anger and resentment. Although he wanted to accept Joe's excuse, he realized that situations like this had always occurred throughout their relationship. Somehow, Joe seemed to always "unintentionally" hurt Daniel, and never had he taken responsibility for his actions.

Example 2:

"Sara" and "Michelle" had been friends since elementary school. Their parents were next-door neighbors, so they naturally grew up in this friendship. As a teenager, Sara told Michelle that she had a crush on "Mike."

Soon after, Michelle became Mike’s girlfriend.

Soon, Sara started dating someone else, but as soon as her new relationship began, Michelle dumped Mike, only to start flirting with her friend’s new man. Naturally, Sara felt profoundly hurt, betrayed, and foolish. Still, she accepted when Michelle explained to her that Mike “was her soul mate.”

Sara then realized that there had been a similar behavior pattern from Michelle over the years. Attempts to discuss this lead to denials and profuse reminders of Michelle’s loyalty to Sara. Whenever Sara tried to limit the closeness between her and Michelle, the latter would find ways to draw her back in.

The last straw was years later when Sara walked in on her fiancé having an affair with Michelle in their shared apartment – the one where they were supposed to get married in.

As you can see, both scenarios narrated above are examples of everyday emotional sadism. Being the victim of emotional sadism can make you question your sanity and your right to be angry.

From the study discussed earlier, you can tell that sadists, in particular, are more willing than the average dark trait to hurt another person even in the absence of provocation. They even like to increase the intensity and severity of their attack when they know that their target won’t fight back or retaliate.

So, how do you deal with everyday sadists in your life?

- Pay attention to how you feel. Sadistic individuals are incredibly skilled at evoking self-doubt, shame, shock, and anger in others. They can also make you feel guilty for having these feelings about them. If your relationship with someone in your life is characterized by the above emotions, you may be dealing with someone who fits into sadism or any other dark tetrad traits.

- Recognize whether you’re a prime target for the sadistic personality type. A sadist has an uncanny ability to identify people who might be willing to tolerate, rationalize, ignore, deny, or even accept responsibility for the sadist’s malicious behavior. If you tend to attract people with dark traits in any area of your life, reflect on whether you’ve tolerated similar treatment thus far.

- It can be difficult to wrap your mind around the idea of someone you’re

intimate with delighting in your pain, suffering, or misery. But you shouldn't judge people based on your values and don't expect them to adhere to social rules the same way you do. Seek professional help. A licensed professional can help you resolve the cognitive dissonance and perform a vital "reality check" so that you can protect yourself.

We all cause emotional hurt to the people we love in one way or another, whether due to ignorance, conflict, or feeling threatened. However, the critical components of sadism are the intent to harm, enjoy causing another person distress, a lack of empathy, and a lack of remorse.

You can use the above tips to spot those who might seek to intentionally harm you and, more importantly, protect yourself from them.

CHAPTER 7:
Gaslighting: How to Recognize and Stop It

Gaslighting is a form of psychological mind control and manipulation where an individual or group makes someone doubt their perception of reality, memories, and sanity. Victims of gaslighting often feel confused, anxious, doubtful, and unable to trust themselves.

The term gaslighting originates from the 1938 play “Gaslight,” subsequently adapted into a film in 1944. In the play, a husband manipulates his wife into believing she’s mentally ill. He does this by dimming the gas-fueled lights in their house. And when the wife complains about the dimmed light, he tells her that she’s hallucinating.

Gaslighting is insidious and one of the worst forms of manipulation techniques. It may be used by people who fall under the dark triad traits and everyday people. This chapter will discuss the common signs, causes, and examples of gaslighting. We’ll also look at how you can respond to gaslighting and the appropriate time to seek help.

Gaslighters deliberately and systemically feed false information to people, leading them to question what they know to be true about themselves. Over time, the manipulations become more complex and compelling, making it increasingly hard for victims to realize the truth. Victims may end up doubting their memory, perception, and eventually, their sanity.

Manipulative individuals who use gaslighting target victims’ sense of identity and self-worth. They do so to attain power and control over victims, either because they derive enjoyment from the cruel act or because they want emotional, physical, or financial control over their victims.

A relationship with a gaslighter often starts reasonably well. They may shower you with praise and affection on a first date and immediately begin to share intimate details. The gaslighter does this to establish trust quickly before any intimacy has been formed. It is part of the process of love bombing the victim. The more you trust and become enamored with them, the quicker the abuser can begin the next phase of their manipulation.

Often, the gaslighter starts by lying about the simplest of things, but the misinformation soon grows, and they may accuse you of lying or disrespecting them if you question the narrative. They typically use occasional positive reinforcement to confuse victims further. Still, at the same time, they may try to turn friends and loved ones against a victim, specifically by spreading false narratives. They may tell friends, family, and even coworkers that the victim is lying or delusional.

As previously noted, gaslighting takes different forms. It also develops gradually, making it incredibly difficult to detect. According to the National Domestic Violence Hotline, some techniques that gaslighters use include:

- **Countering:** This is when the gaslighter questions your memories. They may tell you that "you never remember things exactly as they happen" or ask if you're "sure about what happened because you have a bad memory."
- **Trivializing:** This occurs when the gaslighter disregards or simplifies your feelings for you. They may accuse you of being too sensitive or overreacting when you share valid feelings and concerns.
- **Withholding:** When a gaslighter withholds, they avoid engaging in a conversation with you. Someone using this technique may pretend not to remember or understand something that happened so that they don't have to respond to you. For example, they might say, "you're only trying to confuse me," or "I have no idea what you're talking about."
- **Diverting:** A gaslighter uses this technique to change the focus of a conversation in a way that questions your credibility. For instance, they might say, "you say the craziest things. Maybe you just got another crazy idea from your friends."
- **Denial:** This involves an individual pretending to forget how events occurred. They may deny having said something or blame someone else for making things up.
- **Stereotyping:** The American Sociological Review published an article that stated that someone using gaslighting tactics might deliberately use negative stereotypes associated with the other person's sex, gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, or age to manipulate them. For example, they may tell a black woman that people will think she's aggressive or irrational if

she tries to seek help or abuse.

- **Hoovering:** When you try to leave a gaslighter, they may start talking about how much they love you and praise all of your positive qualities. They may also promise that things are going to change between you. But soon after you agree to stay with them, things revert to how they were.

While gaslighting can happen to anyone, it is most common in social interactions and intimate relationships where there is a power imbalance. Someone on the receiving end of gaslighting is being abused, even though they may not realize or acknowledge it.

Here are some relationship dynamics where gaslighting typically occurs:

- **Romantic relationships:** An emotionally or physically abusive partner may accuse their victim of being delusional or crazy to isolate them from family and friends, undermine their self-confidence, and make them susceptible to control. For example, they might repeatedly tell you that you're forgetful until you start to accept it as the truth.

- **Parent-child relationship:** Abusive caregivers typically shame and control their children through gaslighting. They may belittle their feelings by accusing them of being too sensitive or deliberately misremembering things that happened when they were younger.

- **Medical gaslighting:** A medical professional may trivialize or completely dismiss a person's valid health concerns based on the assumption that they are mentally incompetent. They may tell the patient their symptoms and illness are "in their head." Research conducted in 2009 found that doctors are twice as likely to attribute heart disease symptoms in older women to mental illness than older men.

- **Political gaslighting:** This is when a politician or political group uses lies, deceptions, denials, or manipulated information to mass-control the audience. Examples include hiding things they've done wrong, attacking the credibility of political opponents based on mental incompetency, or courting controversy to redirect attention from important political events.

- **Racial gaslighting** occurs when people use gaslighting tactics for a group of people based on their race or ethnicity. For example, a white gaslighter may deny that black people experience discrimination despite abundant

evidence that says otherwise.

Power Imbalance and Gaslighting

Several studies have examined the relationship between power differences in a relationship and gaslighting. Many of these studies have established that people with low power and those with high power typically experience more gaslighting in their relationships than those with moderate power.

First, you need to keep in mind that gaslighting is often subtle. That is because gaslighters don't need to be overt about power – in most cases, they know their victim wants to avoid conflict. This makes the power struggle in gaslighting primarily invisible.

Also, when two people in a relationship have nearly equal power, there are overt attempts at control. After all, power rankings are dynamic. This isn't the case in unequal relationships. It is much harder to destabilize the status quo directly in these cases. Therefore, the gaslighter uses subtler attempts at control.

Therefore, while people with moderate power are likelier to have their power challenged, they are less likely to be victims of gaslighting. In comparison, individuals with high or low dependence on power are more prone to gaslighting and more likely to indirectly have their power challenged.

In any relationship with power imbalance, the powerless or less powerful depend more on the powerful than vice versa. And this dependence is what gaslighters seek to abuse. But that makes us wonder why powerful people can also be victims of gaslighting?

Maybe an influential person is more likely to be gaslighted by a victim of gaslighting. The victim is likely "mimicking their gaslighter's 'successful' conflict behaviors in a futile attempt to regain their sense of reality."

Signs of Gaslighting in a Relationship

The more you are aware of the signs of gaslighting, the quicker you can recognize them and prevent yourself from falling into the gaslighter's trap. Below, let's look at common red flags that point to gaslighting in an interpersonal relationship.

- **They tell outright lies.** You know it's a blatant lie, yet this person is telling you with a straight face. Why are they lying so blatantly? The answer is that they're setting up a precedent. Once they get away with this massive lie, you become unsure about anything they say. Their goal is to keep you unsteady and off-kilter.

- **They deny what they say, even when you confront them with proof.** You know they promised to do something; you're sure you heard it. But they outright deny it. This makes you start questioning whether you were right – maybe you imagined it, and they never said it. And the more they follow this pattern, the more you doubt your reality and start questioning theirs.

- **They use the important things in your life as ammunition.** They understand how dear your identity is and how important your kids are to you. So, they try to attack the near and dear things first. They might tell you that you should never have had children because you're unfit to raise them. They will tell you that you would be a worthy person if you didn't have an exhaustive list of negative habits. Their goal is to attack the very core of your being to destroy your self-confidence.

- **This is one of the most insidious things gaslighters do – and they do it gradually, over time. They tire you out over time.** There is a lie here and there, a snide comment occasionally, and it starts building up like that. Even the most self-aware person can be a victim of gaslighting – that is how effective it is.

- **Their actions are different from their words.** When dealing with someone who gaslights, focus more on their actions than what they say. Usually, what they say means nothing; it's just talking. What they do is the real issue.

- **They use confusion to weaken you.** A gaslighting partner knows that everyone appreciates having a sense of stability. They uproot your normalcy so that you can question everything every day. And, as a human, your natural tendency is to look towards someone that can help you feel more stable – which happens to be the gaslighter.

- **They project their feelings and habits on you.** This person is a cheat or drug addict, yet they constantly accuse you of this behavior. They do this so often that you become defensive and are distracted from their negative

behavior.

- **They try to align with others against you.** Gaslighters are skilled at manipulating and finding those they're sure will stand by them against you, no matter what. And they align these people against you. They might make comments such as, "Dan says you're useless too," or "Jessica knows that you are wrong too." Keep in mind that these people may not have said these things. Gaslighters are perpetual liars. They do it when they use this tactic, so you don't know who to trust. The goal is to isolate you from everyone in your life. And that's what they need to keep you under their control.

- **They call everyone you know a liar.** By telling that everyone else is a liar, they want you to question your perception of reality. You think they must be telling the truth because you've never known anyone as brazen as them. But no, that's just a manipulation technique that pushes you to turn to them for the "correct" information – which is never actually correct.

There are times when gaslighting may not be gaslighting. You should consider a wide range of factors when trying to identify gaslighting. Many people struggle to understand which behavior counts as gaslighting and which doesn't.

Sometimes, gaslighting is misused. Some people use it to label any behavior that the receiver disagrees with to shut arguments down. It's important to understand what counts as gaslighting and what doesn't.

Here is a range of times when behaviors might sound like gaslighting but aren't gaslighting. Perhaps you've said some of the following:

- "You misunderstand me; that is not what I meant."
- "I don't remember it happening like that."
- "I didn't mean to."
- "What I said wasn't bad."

Many of us have most likely said things along these lines in our relationships. Would that make us gaslighters? Probably not.

Intentionality is at the core of gaslighting. It is intentional behavior that is targeted at diminishing your sense of reality or denying your experiences to keep the gaslighter in control. Also, malice is at the crux of gaslighting

manipulation.

How to Protect Yourself from Gaslighting

Gaslighting can leave you unstable, confused, out-of-body, enraged, and resentful. Yet your gaslighter won't admit what they are doing even if you confront them. Below are some strategies to help you cope:

- Limit contact. Don't talk to your gaslighter unless you need to. Don't say "hi" in the halls or go for a quick lunch together. Remember that gaslighters always have a hidden agenda.
- Don't believe the things they say or give them too much allowance in your mind.
- If you get enraged and retaliate, the gaslighter will try to paint you as the bad guy or act like the victim to get others to sympathize with them. Ambiguity will serve you well when dealing with a gaslighter. Give them responses like "I'm confused" or "Really?"
- Talk to people in your support network, particularly those that can validate your perceptive, remind you that you aren't crazy, and help you strategize against the gaslighter.
- Practice a daily task of reminding yourself of your strengths, successes, and good qualities to counter the negative narrative being planted by the gaslighter.
- Keep a personal journal where you can record your interactions with the person gaslighting you.
- If your gaslighter is at your workplace, consider leaving the job. The same goes for a relationship – leaving is usually the best response to gaslighting.

Try these coping strategies if you think you have a gaslighter in your life. Suppose you feel like gaslighting has done a number on you. In that case, don't be ashamed to seek professional help from a trained and licensed psychologist.

CHAPTER 8:
The Art of Brainwashing and Mind Control

It should come as no shock to you that mind control does indeed exist. Behavioral psychology is neither mystical nor supernatural, but its science may seem so to someone unfamiliar with the field. Sometimes, the advantages of mental shaping through behavioral principles and techniques can be pretty dramatic.

Still, some people strongly dismiss the science of behavioral psychology as that "touchy-feely stuff." If you've never been a victim of mind and control or brainwashing, it makes sense if you're a skeptic. However, you should know that plenty of studies have proven the fact about brainwashing.

If you would just observe or maybe even experiment with some simple exercises from behavioral science, you may find that the mind really can be controlled – but perhaps not in the way the media portrays.

Naturally, it helps to understand the core notion of behavioral psychology – that behavior is subject to its consequences. Let's look at an example.

A mugger tries to snatch a guy's wallet, but unfortunately, this guy is trained in karate. Thus, the mugger is met with a full-contact karate kick and an ear-splitting warning: "Don't even think about it!"

Do you think the mugger would persist in snatching this guy's wallet? Not. He might continue in that career path, but not on that day. The karate guy has momentarily influenced the mugger's mind and behavior. It may not seem like it, but that is one effective form of mind control.

The would-be victim influenced the mugger's behavior by controlling the consequence of his behavior. He introduced two aversive events – karate kick and loud warning – into the equation. Behaviorists would call each event "positive punishment" because the punishing event has already been introduced into the situation.

Of course, negative punishment works a little differently.

A mugger tries to snatch a guy's wallet – but the guy stops him, calmly

removes his wallet, and says to the mugger, “Pardon me for a bit,” then sets the wallet on fire with gasoline and a lighter.

Again, the mugger is forced to re-evaluate the outcome of his behavior – only this time, it’s through negative punishment. Something he truly desired has been removed from the behavioral equation.

This works just as well using reward rather than punishment. And below, let’s look at some examples of how rewarding events can control behavior.

- A dog responds to his trainer’s cue and performs a complex command he was just taught – and the trainer responds by tossing large treats into the air. It’s treat time.

- A hardworking employee at a marketing firm lands the biggest deal of the year for her company – and as an appreciation, her boss gives her a hefty bonus check and two tickets to Hawaii for the summer.

In these two examples, a task well-executed is rewarded with something desired introduced into the behavioral situation. The rewarding event makes both the dog and the employed lady more likely to renew such efforts in other situations.

The point of every scenario above is to highlight that behavior can be controlled, which is what the art of mind control is all about.

You have most likely tried to convince someone of something at one point in your life. Or maybe someone has tried to convince you of something. Of course, you’ve most definitely been in either situation.

Everyone has. The media constantly bombards us with ads for products to buy. In social media and real life, we’re exposed to people’s opinions and rants about voting, who to vote, what to read, who to read, etc. The fact is that the art of brainwashing and mind control is a profitable industry.

Mind control is often used synonymously with brainwashing, so we’ll be talking about both as one in this chapter. According to the American Psychological Association’s dictionary, mind control is “an extreme form of social influence used to indoctrinate an individual in the attitudes and beliefs of a group, usually one that is religious or political nature.”

The APA defines brainwashing as a “broad class of intense and often

coercive tactics intended to produce profound changes in attitudes, beliefs, and emotions." It further says that targets of brainwashing have "typically been prisoners of war and members of religious or political cults."

Mind control (also brainwashing) is complex. Its purpose is to override a person's traditional beliefs, desires, or will and replace them with the desires or will of the individual or group doing the brainwashing.

This dark psychology technique is typically associated with abuse and cults. For example, a cult leader might use a friendly and warm demeanor to win over someone's trust, then gradually break the person down through a series of devaluation and abuse techniques. The abuse might be interspersed with occasional acts of kindness and complete isolation from loved ones, leaving the victim dependent on the cult leader.

Victims of abuse often report feeling brainwashed by their abuser, who sometimes convinced them that the abuse was a sign of love. In many instances, brainwashing is achieved by using powerful mind-altering drugs that can induce hallucinations and make the victim feel euphoric.

American POWs were helped captive by Korean and Chinese captors during the Korean War in prison camps. Ultimately, many prisoners confessed to things that hadn't been done – like waging germ warfare. Even when the war ended and prisoners were released, at least 21 POWs chose to stay back instead of returning to the United States. By the end of their captivity, most of these soldiers had pledged their allegiance to communism.

Psychology also refers to brainwashing as "thought reform," classified in the sphere of "social influence." Most of us may not realize it, but social influence occurs every minute of every day.

It's based on the collective ways people can change others' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. For example, "compliance" is a mind-control technique aimed at triggering a change in someone's behavior without concern for their beliefs or attitudes. It takes the "just do it" approach.

In contrast, the **persuasion** method aims to produce a change in a person's attitude. It takes the "Do it because you'll feel good" approach. Then, the education method – also called the propaganda method – goes the social-influence route, trying to change a person's belief. The "Do it because you

know it’s the right thing to do” method. The propaganda method is used when the target doesn’t believe in what’s being taught.

Brainwashing and mind control is extreme forms of social influence that combine all three approaches to effect changes in a person’s way of thinking – and by consequence, behaving – usually against their will and without said person’s consent.

As brainwashing is an unbelievably invasive form of manipulative influence, it depends on the subject’s complete isolation and dependency. That is why it is most popularly used in cults or prison camps.

The brainwasher requires complete control over the target so that all of the target’s needs depend on them, including eating, sleeping, using the bathroom, and other basic human needs. Everything depends on the will of the brainwashing agent.

In this process, the agent gradually and systemically breaks down the subject’s identity until it falls apart. Then, they replace these with a new set of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that align with the subject’s current environment.

Generally, psychologists believe that brainwashing is achievable under the right circumstances, but they also think it is less severe than the media portrays it to be. Some psychological definitions of brainwashing imply that the threat of violence or physical harm must be present for brainwashing to work.

Tips to Recognize and Avoid Brainwashing

Throughout history, brainwashing techniques have been used by abusive caregivers and spouses, cult leaders, self-proclaimed psychics, revolutionaries, dictators, and secret societies to bring others under their control and manipulate them.

One thing about brainwashing techniques is that they don’t involve the use of magical powers or sophisticated weapons. But they do require you to understand the human psyche and a willingness to exploit it.

Regardless of whether you intend to use them, understanding these techniques can help you learn the best ways to protect yourself and your

loved ones from them. So, how do you recognize brainwashing tactics?

The first thing you should know is that brainwashing agents typically seek out the weak and vulnerable. They don't target everyone except those who appear susceptible to different forms of mind control.

A skillful manipulator has specific features and qualities they look for – they might target someone going through a difficult period in life or generally going through change. You could be a potential target for mind control if you:

- Have just lost your employment and, as a result, are fearful for their future.
- Have recently gone through a divorce, particularly a bitter one.
- Recently, you lost a loved one, particularly someone you were very close to, with just a few friends in your life.
- Are newly away from home alone for the first time.
- Have been described as socially awkward by your peers.

Someone looking to prey on anyone who falls in any of the categories above would typically find out as much information as possible about the person and their belief system. The point of this predatory tactic is to find ways to explain whatever tragedy that person has experienced in a manner consistent with their beliefs.

The next thing is to always be on the lookout for anyone who tries to isolate you from outside influences. As someone going through a difficult time is inclined to seek solitude, a skillful manipulator tries to amplify the feelings of loneliness. Isolation can take different forms.

- For someone in a cult, they might prevent from contacting their loved ones.
- For an individual in an abusive relationship, the abuser might never let you out of their sight or permit you to remain in communication with loved ones.

Be aware of the attack on your self-esteem. For brainwashing to work, the agent needs to be in a superior position to the potential victim. Of course, this means that the victim needs to feel broken, after which the manipulator can rebuild their self-image in their own model. This can be achieved through emotional, mental, or physical means – until the target is emotionally worn

down.

- Mental tortures often begin with lying to the target of brainwashing and then move into shaming or intimidating them. This can be done through words or gestures, such as expressions of disapproval or invading the target's privacy and personal space.
- Emotional tortures usually include verbal insults, badgering, spitting, and dehumanizing things. These tactics aim to break down the victim's instinct to fight back so that they become docile.
- Physical tortures may include sleep deprivation, starvation, freezing, and even beatings. These torture methods are popular with abusive parents and spouses.

You should also be wary of anyone who tries to make being "part of the group" more appealing than the outside world. After wearing down the victim's self-esteem and natural resistance, the brainwasher knows they have to offer a seemingly better alternative to what the victim is used to. This is usually done through various methods, some of which are below:

- They only allow contact with other brainwashed people. This is to put a form of peer pressure on the victim to encourage the new subject to want to seek acceptance by the new group.
- They never give you enough time to think on your own. Or they constantly bombard you with repeated lectures on topics that may not make sense to you while dismissing questions.

Once a person has identified with an abuser, cult leader, or captor through brainwashing, they become resistant to severing ties. Fortunately, more intervention organizations are being established everywhere to help victims of brainwashing and cult escapees.

Not all cults take on a "cult-ish" appearance. Many seemingly harmless "groups" are cults in reality when you look at the members and how they're operated. This may cause you to wonder about some of the "groups" in your life. Are you being manipulated or mind-controlled without your consent? Let's look at an example.

Let's pretend you just joined a new group called "Peace Corps." It all started when you made a small donation to their cause. Then, some fun event where

you make lots of new friends. Before you know it, you're going to seminars all around the country while your career or education remains on hold. What went wrong there? Were you manipulated? No. You were influenced.

Brainwashing techniques are rarely used by individuals, so watch out for new groups you join. Also, here are some tips to help you recognize when someone in your life has been brainwashed.

- See if there's a mixture of extremism and dependency. Brainwashing victims are usually focused on the group they are into the point of obsession. They may find it difficult to do anything without the help of their group leader.
- Watch out for a "yes person" in their life. A victim of brainwashing will rarely question their group or leader. They may withdraw from you if you don't share their interest in the group, its leader, and their activities.
- A brainwashing victim may become lonely, listless, withdrawn, and detached from life. If they were full of life before, they would lose whatever personality was present before they met the brainwasher. This is particularly obvious in people in abusive relationships.

CHAPTER 9:
Six Ways to Master the Art of Persuasion

Persuasion plays a central role in interpersonal and intimate relationships. Think of persuasion as the direct opposite of brainwashing. They're both used to influence and possibly control behavior, but their utilizations are far apart.

Persuasion fosters cooperation. When two or more people gather, persuasion begins. Consciously or subconsciously, they will try to persuade each other to do different things. One person might try to convince the rest of the group to go to a specific restaurant or engage in a choice activity. Phe difference between

Persuasion is the "art of convincing others to do what you want them to do because they want to, not because they are forced to." It is the influence you have on other people to make them change their beliefs, decisions, or behavior – through reasoning or request. And that is where persuasion differs from other techniques used to influence thinking and behavior.

Every day, someone is trying to influence you. Some people do it underhanded, while others do it annoyingly. And unless you live in a cave, you're also constantly trying to influence people.

Robert Cialdini, a behavioral psychologist, and best-selling author, is considered the godfather of persuasion psychology. He wrote the book *Influence,* where he proposed six principles of persuasion that have become widely popular, especially in fields such as marketing and business.

What are the six principles of persuasion, according to Robert Cialdini?

Reciprocity

Humans value equity and balance. When someone gives you something, you naturally feel like you should give them something back – unless you're a narcissist, psychopath, or Machiavellian. If someone sends you a card and flowers on your birthday, you most likely will send them something similar on their birthday.

The value is not on the gift but on the act of gifting itself. People generally feel the need to give back to someone who provided them with something of value. This could be a product, service, or information.

Reciprocity is a vital principle because cooperation is necessary for survival in the history of human evolution. When trying to persuade, ensure you're offering the person something that is not only positive but also beneficial.

According to Cialdini, humans have "a natural tendency to dislike a person who brings unpleasant information, even when that person didn't cause the bad news. The simple association with it is enough to stimulate our dislike."

Your chances of exerting influence are meager if the person you're trying to influence already dislikes you.

Scarcity

Scarcity increases value – the less there is of something, the more valuable it becomes, and the more everyone wants (needs) to have it. Let's say you have someone you want to date who wouldn't so much as give you their time. In that case, stop making yourself available at that person's beck and call.

Instead, create a sense of scarcity for yourself and your time. This automatically translates into a sense of urgency and courts their interest. This also applies to product, service, or experience. When you check an airline's website, they tell you "there are only five seats left at this price."

People want you more when they believe that you're unavailable. It may appear sad, but that is how humans are hardwired.

Social Proof

In any situation, humans are wired to perceive a behavior as more correct to the degree that we see others behaving in the same way. That is the essence of social proof. Here's something you can try in the comfort of your home: Play your favorite sitcom featuring a laughter track (something like *Friend, The Big Bang Theory*). Find a muted version of the show on YouTube and watch without the laugh track.

You probably won't find many scenes in the show as funny as you previously did. Research shows that audiences laugh longer and more frequently when a

laughter track runs. This is how social proof works.

When you find yourself in awkward or difficult situations, you first look at everyone around the room before reacting. You do this to ensure that their reactions are socially "correct." After all, you don't want to be the odd one out.

Social proof plays a crucial role in our lives because we're likely to make fewer mistakes when we follow the crowd. Although there are cons to always going with the crowd instead of against it, those skilled in the art of persuasion exploit the concept of social proof by telling you that "everyone else is doing it."

In short, we're wired to think that we should do something if everyone else is doing it. Whenever you're trying to sway someone in a particular direction, just ensure that you're doing it in alignment with your values and theirs.

Authority

Put simply; people respect authority because they know it usually points to credibility. You're more likely to take medical advice from "Dr. Chris" than you would from a "Mr. Chris." Similarly, you're more likely to purchase weight-loss products if promoted by someone with your ideal weight, so product endorsements are popular among Instagram influencers and models. You always purchase your "dentist-recommended" toothpaste and floss brands because you believe in the dentists who recommended them.

In all of these scenarios, you have authoritative individuals who are presumably more knowledgeable about a subject than you are. Putting your trust in an authority figure saves you time. It is cognitively resourceful, and it also helps to shift the blame when a product or service doesn't turn out to be as good as the authority figure led you to believe.

To influence people yourself, cite recognized experts on whatever topic you're talking about. Then, exert influence based on indirect expertise. If you want to protect yourself from influence by seeming authority figures, always screen through their messages and see if they have anything to gain from persuading you.

Never let yourself be swayed by messages given by authority only.

Consistency (Commitment)

Once we agree to something, we are less likely to back out. The average person believes in the nobility of keeping our word because it allows us to function harmoniously as a society.

Our culture is powered by the need to “save face” and be consistent. There is a social shame attached to inconsistency, especially with our words. It is evident in how we describe people who regularly change their minds or refuse to commit – “wimp,” “wishy-washy,” etc.

You can use this principle to influence people by getting them to agree and say yes to the seemingly small things, after which you can move on to larger requests. Experts call this the “foot-in-the-door” technique.

Another way you can use the consistency principle is to remind people who might be hesitant to take your side of their past decisions. You can highlight how your request is similar, and in doing so, you imply that they should be consistent in their decision-making.

Similarly, be aware if these techniques are being tried on you by anybody. If yes, feel free to quote the popular economist John Maynard Keynes, who once said, “When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, sir?”

Likeability

It shouldn’t surprise you that we’re inclined to say “yes” to people we like. Repetition is one of the things that make us like someone. Hearing your name repeatedly helps you form a liking for the person you’re interacting with, particularly when they’re physically attractive. Also, receiving compliments makes us susceptible to persuasion when we otherwise wouldn’t be. Make yourself likable to build a foundation upon which you can try to persuade others.

How you use the principles of persuasion depends on context. Let’s say you’re trying to get more clients for your business. That is a corporate context so that you can use the authority principle. In other words, you should secure an expert’s endorsement to give credibility to your brand.

Now, in a social context, assuming you’re trying to get invited to someone’s party. In that case, you can invite this person to a birthday party first. The

recipient is likely to follow the reciprocity principle and return the favor some other time.

To become more convincing, experiment with different persuasion strategies. The most important thing to remember is that people are more likely to be swayed by someone they like. So, spend time with a colleague to get to know them or simply bring them coffee on your way up. These are some ways to make yourself more persuasive.

Persuasion in Politics

Politics is inherently linked to persuasion. From a political candidate's journey to secure votes from constituents to public demonstrations for administrative action to pass new legislation, politics is the perfect illustration of how influence leads to change.

Research has shown three principles that influence how voters respond to political messaging. The first principle is that politicians should know the brain network they're activating. In other words, the words used in a political message should evoke associations with the voters' values. For example, you should say "people who've lost their homes" instead of "the homeless."

The second principle is to use words that appeal directly to the voters' emotions. Political messages that tap into voters' hope, pride, satisfaction, and enthusiasm are more readily accepted than those that tap into emotions such as anger, anxiety, fear, and disgust.

Finally, the third principle is that political candidates should try to tell stories instead of explaining policies. The human brain is designed to understand, remember, and share information presented in a narrative form.

You can influence people without necessarily using dark psychology techniques. Remember that the critical difference between persuasion and techniques such as brainwashing is that the former isn't done with the intent to harm or exploit the other person.

CHAPTER 10:
How to Read and Interpret Body Language

Everyone is constantly giving clues to their thoughts and feelings via body language. Communication can be verbal or non-verbal – and non-verbal messages typically include body movements, vocal tone and volume, facial expressions, and other signals. Collectively, these make up what we know as body language. It is like a silent orchestra that lets you know what is going on in a person's mind.

Micro-expressions, hand gestures, and posture register in the human brain almost as soon as they are received – even when you aren't consciously aware that you've perceived anything. For this reason, body language dramatically affects how you interpret other people's moods, motivations, or openness. It also colors, in turn, how you're perceived by others.

Body language is a powerful form of communication, but it mostly happens below the level of consciousness. For instance, when you're at your favorite restaurant waiting for a blind date to arrive, you may nervously tap your fingers on a nearby surface without being consciously aware of it.

From facial expressions to body movements, the things people don't say to you can still convey tons of information. Research has suggested that boy language accounts for 60 to 65 percent of all communication. That is quite a lot.

It's important to understand body language, but it's just as important to pay attention to other cues, including context, when interpreting. It never helps to focus on a single action. Instead, always look at the non-verbal signals as a group.

Most of us spend our lives learning to decode non-verbal cues from others. While you're trying to decode someone's messages via their body language, they're also trying to do the same to you. Sometimes, you want other people to know precisely how you're feeling, particularly when the feelings are positive and reciprocated. Doing this isn't always easy.

At other times, you want to hide everything you feel so that no one can

decode your inner state. To protect yourself from potential emotional leakage, you may have to do twice the work. Depending on the situation or context, you may need to put on your best poker face.

Body language is just as it is – the language of the physical body. Whether you're showing or hiding your complete mental state, your entire body is involved. Your emotions aren't only reflected through your face – that's just the tip of the iceberg.

The most skillful manipulators have mastered the art of controlling their body's cues. Narcissists, psychopaths, and Machiavellians are exceptional at this, so it's much harder to detect their intentions when they come sneaking into your life. But if you learn to read body language just as much as they've learned to hide it, recognizing manipulation and gaslighting becomes significantly easier.

This chapter will teach you how the best manipulators control their body's cues and how you, too, can master this. By the end, you will have acquired a greater understanding of how even the most seemingly trivial bodily gestures can inform you of a person's true feelings and intentions towards you. With this knowledge and regular practice, you can also learn to control your body language and become more skilled at reading people.

The face is the first place to start when reading body language. So, let's start by talking about facial expressions and their meanings.

Facial Expressions

Think briefly about how much you can convey with a simple facial expression. A smile typically indicates joy, happiness, or approval, while a frown can indicate unhappiness or disapproval. In most cases, someone's facial expressions can reveal their true feelings about you or a particular situation. If you say that you feel fine, the look on your face may suggest otherwise to people.

Examples of emotions that are expressed via facial expressions are:

- Happiness
- Sadness
- Surprise

- Fear
- Anxiety
- Confusion
- Excitement
- Anger
- Contempt
- Desire

A person's facial expression can help you determine whether to trust them or not.

The eyes are referred to as the "windows to the soul" by many because they're believed to be capable of revealing a great deal about what someone is thinking or feeling. As you converse with another person, taking note of their eye movements is vital in the communication process.

You may notice whether the person is making direct eye contact or averting their gaze, if they're frequently blinking, or if their pupils are dilated. Pay attention to the following when trying to read body language:

- **Gaze:** When someone looks directly into your eyes during a conversation, that's usually a sign that they're interested and paying attention. But prolonged eye contact can be threatening or unsettling. Contrarily, frequently breaking eye contact or looking away could indicate that the person is uncomfortable, distracted, or trying to hide their real feelings from you.

- **Blinking:** How often a person blinks can indicate their mental state. Usually, people blink more rapidly when they are distressed or uncomfortable. On the other hand, infrequent blinking may be an indication that someone is intentionally controlling their eye movements. You should always pay attention to whether someone blinks too much or too little.

- **Pupil size:** The size of a person's pupil is another nonverbal communication signal. Emotions can cause size changes in the pupil. For example, the pupils can become highly dilated when talking to someone you're interested in.

Mouth

Mouth movements and expressions can also help in reading body language. For example, people sometimes chew on their bottom lips when worried, fearful, or insecure about something. Covering the mouth when you cough or yawn is often a polite gesture, but it's sometimes used to hide a frown – which usually points to disapproval.

A smile is one of the best body languages, but it can be interpreted differently. It may be genuine or used to express faux happiness, sarcasm, and even cynicism. When reading body language, observe the following signals:

- **Lip biting:** People sometimes bite their lips when experiencing feelings such as stress, anxiety, and worry.
- **Pursed lips:** Tightening the lips often indicates disapproval, distaste, or distrust.
- **Turned up/down:** Slight movements in the mouth are subtle indicators of what you're feeling. A slightly turned-up mouth could mean that you're feeling happy or optimistic. Conversely, a slightly turned-down mouth could mean that you're feeling sad or disapproving.

Signs of Lying and Deception

Did you know that as many as 96% of people admit to lying sometimes? That's how common lying is. Like lying, deception is also an expected human behavior. A national study that surveyed 1 000 adults in the US had 60% of the respondents claim that they didn't lie.

Interestingly, researchers found that half of the lies in the survey were told by just 5% of the subjects. This shows that even though the prevalence of lying varies, some people are much more prolific at lying than others.

The reality of human nature is that we all probably lie from time to time – especially those little white lies we tell to protect another person's feelings. In other cases, people tell much more severe or even sinister lies. "No, babe, that shirt doesn't make you look fat."

Surprisingly, even though many of us tell lies occasionally, we're bad at detecting lies. For example, one study found that people could only accurately detect lying 54% of the time in a laboratory setting – hardly

impressive when you factor in the 50% detection rate based on pure chance alone.

Behavioral differences between liars and honest individuals are difficult to measure or discriminate. Research has been conducted to uncover the many ways we can detect lies. While there isn't a simple, tell-tale signal to watch for (like Pinocchio's nose), researchers have found some helpful indicators that can help us determine when someone is being honest or dishonest.

Detecting a lie usually comes down to trusting your guts – like many things. By knowing the signals that can be accurate indicators of when someone is telling a lie and trusting your instincts, you will become better at identifying falsehoods.

Psychologists have used body language research to help law enforcement discern between honesty and deception. Some of the potential red flags which might be pointers to deception include:

- Being vague and generic, offering as few details as possible.
- Repeating questions before responding to them.
- Speaking in sentence fragments
- Lack of specificity, especially when a story is challenged.
- Grooming gestures include playing with hair, tapping fingers on the table, pressing fingers to lips, etc.

While it is never easy to detect lying and deception, you will become better at it as you train yourself. Without regular training, you may delude yourself into thinking that you can detect deception, but that may be your perceptions that have little to do with your actual ability.

Also, inadequate or hasty training can make you over-analyze everything and overly dependent on your gut reactions.

Suppose you have cause to believe someone isn't telling you the truth. In that case, here are some strategies you can use to discern the truth from lies.

First, ensure you don't rely on body language only. While body language can be an indicator of deception, it isn't always accurate because many expected signals aren't always linked to lying. Yet, people always focus on subtle physical movements and expressions that can reveal deception.

According to Howard Ehrlichman, a psychologist who has studied eye movements since the 1970s, eye movements rarely signify lying in most cases. As a matter of act, he suggests that eye movements usually point to thinking on the part of the person suspected of deception. Also, it may mean that the person is trying to access their long-term memory.

At the same time, many studies have shown that while individual signals and behaviors can be quite helpful in detecting deception, many of the ones associated with lying (such as eye movements) are some of the worst predictors.

Therefore, while body language can be instrumental in detecting lying and deception, the most important thing is to know which signals to pay attention to.

- **Focus on the Right Signals**

A meta-analysis found that whereas people typically rely on valid cues for detecting lies and deceptions, the problem lies with the weakness of those cues as indicators of lying and deception in the first place. A few of the most accurate cues you should pay attention to are:

- **Vagueness**: Suppose the speaker appears to leave out critical details of their story intentionally. In that case, they might be lying to you.

- **Indifference**: A lack of expression, shrugging, and a bored posture can signal that the person is lying because they're used to avoiding conveying emotions and possible tells.

- **Vocal uncertainty**: If the speakers appear unsure or insecure, they may be lying to you.

- **Overthinking**: If the person appears to be thinking too hard to fill in the details of their story, they might be deceiving you.

The point here is that while body language is helpful, you also have to pay attention to the right signals. But some experts suggest that relying too much on signals can impair your ability to detect lying and deception.

Lie detection is a passive process. You may assume that you can just observe the speaker's body language, facial expressions, and body movements to spot obvious signs of lies. However, you're more likely to yield better results if

you take a more proactive approach to uncovering lies.

Experts have suggested that asking people to tell their stories in reverse can make lie detection much more accurate. Verbal and non-verbal cues used to discern lying from truth-telling become more evident as cognitive load increases.

Lying is more taxing on the human brain than telling the truth. Not only is it more cognitively demanding to tell lies, but liars also exert much more mental energy towards monitoring their behaviors and evaluating the responses of others. If you add more cognitive complexities, behavioral cues become even more apparent to someone watching out for them.

They want you to think that they're credible so that they can evaluate your response to their tales. All of this requires considerable effort, so if you add a difficult task to the mix (like asking them to report their story in reverse rather than chronological order), cracks and other behavioral cues become easier to spot.

Your gut reactions are typically more accurate than any conscious lie detection strategy you might try. So, it's important to trust your immediate gut reactions in many cases. But you might be wondering why we're so bad at identifying dishonesty if our gut reactions have such a level of precision.

Well, conscious responses may interfere with the brain's automatic associations. Instead of trusting our instincts, we focus on the stereotypical behaviors and cues often associated with lying, including lack of eye contact and fidgeting.

Focusing too much on behaviors that inaccurately predict deception can make it harder to discern truth from lies.

The fact is that there is no surefire way to tell if or when someone is lying. Every sign, cue, and behavior that researchers associate with lying are nothing more than indicators that might tell us whether a person is being honest or not.

Next time you're trying to detect deception, don't look at the cliché signs. Instead, look out for subtler behaviors that are linked to deception. When needed, put more pressure on the speaker to make lying more mentally taxing than it usually is. Finally, trust your instincts.

Common Ways Body Language Gives People Away

What are some body language cues that can help you infer what an individual is thinking or feeling? Below, we will be looking at ten of them. Remember that body language isn't a proper "language"; therefore, some of these nonverbal cues can have multiple meanings. But if you're an astute person, you can use them to increase your chances of accuracy.

1. Fake smiling

There are genuine smiles, and there are fake smiles. Nonverbal communication experts refer to genuine smiles as "Duchenne smiles," which indicate genuine happiness. Fake smiles, on the other hand, don't. People use fake smiles when they want to look amused but aren't. They also use them when uncomfortable around you but want you to believe that they are having a good time. Both "true" and "fake" smiles have upward turned corners of the lips. But when a smile is genuine (Duchenne), the eyes become narrower, and the outer corners form a crinkle called "crow's feet."

2. Posture

The way someone carries themselves is a subtle clue that can give away their true feelings. An erect posture often points to confidence and pride, whereas a slouched posture could mean that a person is sad and dejected – especially when the head is down too.

3. Self-soothing

When people are stressed, anxious, or uncomfortable, they unconsciously engage in self-soothing nonverbal cues – stroking their leg or neck, hand-to-body contact, hand rubbing, etc. They do this to calm their nerves through self-touching.

4. Gaze behavior

Remember what we said about the eyes being the windows to the soul. A person's gaze behavior can tell you about their interest in you. Do they look at you when you're talking or look away? Are they sizing you up with their eyes? Gaze behavior can give how a person truly feels about you away.

5. Shortfall signals

These nonverbal cues tell you when a person is underreacting. A fake smile is

an example of a shortfall signal that someone isn't happy or amused. Another type of shortfall signal is when you express little or fake outrage at a person's words or actions. Usually, shortfall signals tell you when someone isn't as engaged with the conversation as they should be.

6. Displacement activities

These are the nonverbal behaviors people engage in when tense or anxious. They help to cope with anxiety. Displacement activities are similar to self-soothing behaviors – examples include head-scratching, hand-rubbing, and fiddling with jewelry. These self-soothing behaviors are sometimes used by law enforcement to indicate that someone might be guilty of smuggling or criminal activity.

7. Facial laterality

Usually, facial cues are lateral. For instance, when you smile, both corners of your mouth turn up; when surprised, your two eyes open wide. When facial clues become non-lateral, that could mean that something is wrong. Raising an eyebrow is one good example, suggesting that the other person doesn't trust what you're saying. The person could also be confused, displeased, or perturbed.

8. Tie signs

Tie signs are nonverbal cues that indicate possessiveness. They demonstrate that you're being possessive of another person. Say you're at a party with your partner, and someone else approaches them. You may move closer to your lover, perhaps even touch them to display "ownership." When you want to demonstrate your connection to people you're intimate with, you may hold their hands, put an arm over their shoulders, or move closer to them to show that you're "tied" to them and vice versa. These are examples of tie signs.

CHAPTER 11:

Undue Influence: The Internet and Social Media as Tools for Manipulation and Mind Control

Psychology has shown the power of coercion in directing behavior. Under the right conditions, you can manipulate people into thinking and behaving in ways that don't align with their critical faculties or personal choice. In short, you can "hack" the mind.

Today, it's safe to say that we live in an era of propaganda and psychological coercion on a mass scale. This is the result of the intersection of data science, behavioral science, neuroscience, and artificial intelligence. This has caused an enormous problem of historical significance in the world.

A little over a decade ago, "persuasive technologies" were first introduced as benign forms of mass control. The United States and the United Kingdom governments created "Nudge Units" that applied behavioral sciences in different contexts to influence and control behavior at scale.

At the same time, big tech companies such as Google, Facebook, etc., explored similar ideas through behavior modification and attention capture technology. This alchemical combination of behavioral psychology and digital technology has led to creating a new social reality where technological coercion has become an irremovable part of daily life.

"Undue influence" is the legal term for "brainwashing" and "mind control." When you're under the influence of coercive communication, you aren't freely choosing your actions and beliefs. It's become a fact that supposed "persuasive technologies" – particularly social media – have gone from persuasion to coercion. We don't realize it, but we've become subject to undue influence over our minds and behavior.

Every time you log on to Facebook, Twitter, or any other social networking site, information on your keystrokes is being fed into powerful computers at their headquarters. These computers have algorithms that correlate the data they receive.

The purpose of the algorithms is to experiment with ways to use the received

information to modify your behavior so that you can do what Facebook or Twitter wants. The platforms compare you with people who have similar profiles to yours. Usually, what the platforms want is for you to respond to ads for specific products or services. But they can be trying to influence you to do other things, such as to vote or not to vote.

Social media, without doubt, has harmful effects that include mind manipulation and addiction. Big tech companies use their algorithms to discover things about yourself that you haven't revealed directly to them.

One of their business models is to find ways to attract and hold your attention for as long as possible so that you can be unduly influenced by advertisers, politicians, and even normal social media users like yourself.

From time to time, the algorithms collect a massive amount of data about you, such as your facial expressions, how your body moves, the people you know, what you eat, what you read, and how susceptible you are to attempts at persuasion.

Then, they use this data to create "feeds of stimuli" geared at boosting engagement and making you more susceptible to their ads. Facebook executives have publicly revealed that the company intentionally incorporates addictive techniques into its services, targeted at inducing behavior modification stimuli.

Advertising has changed considerably since we moved from printed media to digital media. During the era of the printed media, advertising was a one-way street. Advertisers sent their ads forth and hoped for the best.

We are all susceptible to being influenced by positive and negative stimuli on a biochemical level. However, in this era of digital media, advertising can now be tailored to match the connections people have and tailor their products accordingly. Advertising in social media involves processes, which include monitoring users closely to measure the effect of ads so that a personalized stream of feed (stimuli) can be periodically adjusted until user behavior is effectively modified.

Positive stimuli can be induced on social networking sites when we're retweeted, friended, or go temporarily viral. On the other hand, negative stimuli conveyed usually include being made to feel unnoticed,

unappreciated, or ridiculed.

Unfortunately, positive stimuli and negative stimuli are pitted against each other unfairly. Positive and negative emotions have considerable power over our behavior, but their timing is often crucially different.

Positive emotions typically build over a more extended period, and we lose them quickly. Contrarily, negative emotions build faster and dissipate very slowly. You may become angry or scared quickly, but the feelings take longer to fade. It's much easier to lose trust than it is to build it.

The consequence is that negative emotions triggered by social media become overemphasized. In contrast, positive ones take quite a while to appear in the feedback loop that influences how social media services are used to manipulate users and society as a whole.

Another thing with social media is that it now serves as a primary gatekeeper for local and international news. This means that we are being kept in filter bubbles, where we only get news that triggers our psychological buttons. After all, most of the materials on the internet are provided by individuals who are not what they pose as on social media. Some are generated by computers and distributed on an internet-wide scale by robots.

The internet was created to be a means of connecting people. Still, negative emotions like anger, fear, and paranoia, as well as xenophobia and conspiracy theories, are what keep these networking sites engaging.

Social media feeds us information meant to stimulate our emotions, and negative feelings are much easier to stimulate than positive ones. This negatively affects the political process in many ways.

Social media is acting as a divisive tool, widening the already existing division in our society. The algorithm tries to reinforce whatever you are – liberal, anti-war, conservative, pro-gun, etc. This inadvertently diminishes your ability to empathize with or simply understand people who don't share the same thoughts and beliefs as you.

You might have observed that social media operates below the awareness level. In other words, you're being subliminally influenced. Soon, we will talk briefly about subliminal influence in the media.

Suppose you want to see how much social media sublimely influences you.

You can turn it off for a specific period, such as three or six months, and see what changes.

That gives you enough time to judge the impact of social media on your thinking and behavior.

Subliminal Messages

Traditional and digital media are all about influence. Everything you see when you check your local newspaper, magazine, advertising billboards, social media feed, etc., is all meant to influence you somehow.

Just now, we've established that the media can be manipulative. Many people believe that the media is used more for manipulation than influence. But have you ever wondered how the media might be manipulating you?

Wikipedia defines media manipulation as "a series of related techniques in which partisans create an image or argument that favors their particular interests." This means that the media uses subliminal messages to create a specific perception of a person, a group, an issue, a place, or anything at all in the mind of the public. This is called subliminal influence.

Subliminal influence is defined as "a process whereby information in printed words, pictures, or sound is passed in a very obscure or rapid way. This process caused the audience to receive and respond to specific messages, information, or instructions without awareness."

The public believes in the media, particularly the traditional media, as the ultimate source of facts. So, we tend to believe in whatever perception the media presents to us. But sometimes, the media want to present information that they know we may not consciously agree with, which is where subliminal messages come into the equation.

Subliminal messages can distinctly impact your thoughts and behavior. They can change your mood, boost motivation, and even change your political attitude. It is a fact that subliminal messages can influence decision-making, such as who a person votes for. And that is the number one reason why they're popularly used in most media forms.

From politicians to advertisers and marketers, everyone uses subliminal messages to try and influence or outright manipulate people's behaviors. It is

one of the tools used in persuasion and manipulation.

The concept of subliminal messages was first introduced in the 1950s. Then, the understanding of how they could be used was almost nonexistent. But research has widened our understanding of the concept even more.

In the dictionary, subliminal is defined as “below the threshold.” Subliminal messages are thus signals and information that we receive below the level of conscious awareness. They refer to information that you don’t consciously pick up because they are targeted at your subconscious. You don’t even know that you’re receiving this information until it starts modifying your thoughts and behavior.

Unless you actively look out for subliminal messages, you cannot pick them up. Even when you do, you still may not be able to pick up on them. That is how subtle they usually are. The absolute threshold for subliminal messages is the basest level of stimuli that falls below what you’re used to in your external environment.

The media sublimely influences our perceptions by deliberately employing communication techniques designed to generate tailored responses. The purpose is to get you to do things that you wouldn’t ordinarily do.

Your perception of a subliminal message and your response both happen on a subconscious level. These two attributes are critical to the concept of subliminal influencing because they distinguish it from supraliminal influencing. Unlike subliminal messages, supraliminal messages are perceivable by the conscious mind.

You may be wondering how subliminal influencing works. Well, the min comprises the conscious and subconscious. Your conscious mind is the one that gives you executive control over everything that happens.

You think, feel, experience, and judge stimuli at a conscious level in complete awareness. On the other hand, the subconscious mind operates below the awareness level. Think of it as the hiding place for your secret desires, fantasies, motives, and experiences.

In terms of information processing, the subconscious is much more powerful and effective. It can process twenty thousand bytes of information at once, whereas the conscious mind only processes 3 to 7 bytes simultaneously.

Compared to the conscious mind, the subconscious mind runs on autopilot.

Your subconscious mind is in charge of things such as breathing in and out. You are not consciously aware of every breath you take because your subconscious is in charge. The same thing applies to subconscious thinking and information processing. Subliminal messages go straight to your subconscious, such that you don't even know when you process them.

Humans have seven sources of sensory input, but two of these are more prominent than others. Your visual (sight) and auditory (hearing) are the primary sensory categories targeted by subliminal messages.

Visual subliminal messages are often embedded or sub-visual. Usually, sub-visual signals are flashed so quickly that you can't perceive them. On the other hand, embedded messages are static cues with a stable environment. They are often hidden in plain sight.

Auditory subliminal messages are typically sub-audible or backmasking. Sub-audible messages are those low-volume sounds embedded within high-volume audios, making them impossible to hear unless you're actively trying to. Backmasking refers to visual-audio messages recorded in reverse to hide the actual messages when you play it forward.

So, in what ways do these subliminal messages influence your thoughts and behavior?

The human brain contains semantically related links of thousands of concepts. Every concept exists within a network of an interlinked web of concepts. One theory is that subliminal messages try to activate the semantic network.

For example, let's look at Tesla – everyone knows Tesla now. When someone mentions Tesla in your presence, you will most likely get flashes about Elon Musk, electric cars, self-driving technology, etc.

Tesla is associated with creative innovation. So, suppose you flash a Tesla logo at someone and then give them a task to complete; they're subconsciously likely to take an innovative approach to the task because their subconscious mind has picked up on what Tesla is associated with.

Subliminal messages are targeted at the subconscious, so politicians, marketers, advertisers, etc., can use them to get us to do things we ordinarily

wouldn’t do. Therefore, they count as a tool of covert manipulation.

Media manipulation through subliminal messages is unethical but is rarely treated as such. Hopefully, there will be positive changes regarding that in the future.

CHAPTER 12:

How Neuro-Linguistic Programming is Leveraged for Covert Manipulation

Many forms of covert manipulation (such as propaganda) have been around for thousands of years. However, newer forms of organized, covert manipulation such as neuro-linguistic programming have only become popular within the past two decades, particularly with the rise of the internet. More people are likely using covert manipulative techniques now than ever.

"Covert" means "hidden, disguised, or covered." When something is covert, it isn't revealed to others. Let's note that not all covert manipulation techniques are dangerous or used with the intent to harm. It all depends on the person using it. Neuro-linguistic programming is one of such covert manipulation techniques that can be used for good or bad.

Neuro-linguistic programming takes a psychological approach that focuses on how intrapersonal and interpersonal communication affects our behaviors and behavior outcomes. Essentially, NLP focuses on how one uses language to communicate with oneself and other people.

The concept of NLP was developed in the 1970s by Richard Bandler and John Grinder. It was born out of the observation that one of the key differences between successful people and the general population lies in how they use language for positive affirmation and motivation for everyone else.

NLP as a model is designed to influence your thoughts, feelings, and behavior. However, it doesn't just stop at that – you can also use NLP to influence others. Of course, this means that other people can also use it to influence you without necessarily seeking your consent.

The belief is that we can model others' behavior and, in turn, their outcomes. In other words, if there's a successful person you admire, you can observe, imitate, and internalize their behavior to recreate their success in your own life.

"Isn't NLP all about getting people to do things they don't want to do?"

The above is one of the most commonly asked questions about neuro-linguistic programming. If we were to go by dictionary meaning, you would find that there's not much difference between influence and manipulation. But the fact is that NLP is a tool – which can be used for influence or manipulation.

Both concepts involve "inducing an effect in another person without apparent exertion of force." However, manipulation is defined as "having control over others by having the ability to influence their behavior (emotions) and their actions so things can go in the manipulator's way."

A manipulator plays on their victim's fears, guilt, or greed. Someone being manipulated feels trapped, pressured, or angry. Furthermore, they may feel helpless and hopeless.

In comparison, the word "influence" is rooted in the Middle English word for "emanation of the stars." It is defined as "the emanation of moral or spiritual force." Not all influences are positive, but those who influence tend to be admirable and charismatic. They make you feel good when you're around them.

The point is that viewing NLP as a tool to get people to do what they don't want to do is akin to saying a hammer is a tool of destruction. Sure, you can use a hammer to smash and destroy things. But the number one use of the hammer is to build. How you use a hammer depends on your underlying motivation as the wielder.

Could someone use NLP to manipulate? Yes. But from experience, that's quite rare. Still, it's essential to learn as much as possible about the ways NLP may be leveraged as a tool for covert manipulation.

As noted earlier, NLP was first introduced in the 1970s. Soon, the concept became popular in psychoanalysis and the occults. Around the '90s and '00s, it became widely known in advertising, marketing, and politics.

Many people no longer remember that it was initially developed as a tool for communication. Since then, it has evolved into a prominent tool in marketing and advertising. Nowadays, nearly all fields focus on influencing people using NLP techniques in one way or another.

The key elements of NLP are modeling, action, and effective communication.

If an individual can understand and model how another individual completes a task, that process can be modeled and communicated to others, pushing them to accomplish the same thing.

According to proponents of neuro-linguistic programming, we all have a map of reality. Individuals who practice NLP analyze perspectives to create a systematic situation overview. By understanding different perspectives, an NLP user gains information.

Proponents of NLP believe that our senses play a vital role in information processing and that the mind and body influence each other. NLP takes an experiential approach. Therefore, if you want to understand an action, you must first perform that same action to gain experience.

NLP techniques can improve communication skills, self-awareness, self-confidence, and your perception of the world. Neuro-linguistic programming may be used to:

- Shift perceptions
- Create better habits
- Change behaviors
- Heal emotional wounds or trauma
- Improve communication and influence
- Decrease stress and anxiety

According to a 2014 research review, NLP is sometimes used as a therapeutic tool for fears, phobias, anxiety, and depression. You can also use it to address allergies, relationship and communication problems, and emotional blocks in life.

Some commonly used NLP techniques include:

- Anchoring
- Swish pattern
- Rapport
- Visual-Kinesthetic dissociation

To use neuro-linguistic programming, you must closely monitor the person you’re trying to influence or manipulate. You should pay attention to subtle

changes in body movements and facial expressions, including eye movement, pupil dilation, skin flush, nervous tics, etc.

Using their observations, a professional in NLP can figure out the following:

- the predominant side of the brain used by the person
- the predominant sensory system
- how their brain receives, interprets, stores, and utilizes information
- when they aren't being forthright

How do you know if someone is trying to manipulate you with NLP?

- Notice if they're copying your body movements and facial expressions. They might sit the way you do or mirror your hand movements. To make sure they aren't, intentionally make a few movements and see if they copy those specific ones.
- If they focus too much on your eyes, move your eyes in random, unpredictable patterns.
- Suppose you are suspicious of someone. In that case, do not let them touch you. Touching is one of the ways NLP users anchor their targets.
- Be aware of the language the person uses in your conversations.
- Read between the lines. Remember that NLP techniques use language with layered meaning.

NLP can be used to alter a person's thinking and behavioral patterns. Therefore, it can be an effective tool for manipulation. So, if you have any NLP practitioners in your life, be extra careful of them.

CHAPTER 13:

Family Manipulation Tactics: How to Respond and Protect Yourself

Family dynamics are usually marked by manipulative behavior of varying degrees. Some manipulative behaviors are relatively harmless – like when your mother pulls the "I spent a full day in labor bringing you into the world, so it's time you brought some children of your own. I want my grandkids!" In a family with healthy relationship dynamics, it's normal to crack jokes and probably mimic your mother's words.

This is one way of emotionally appealing to you to get what she wants. But you understand where that is coming from, so there are no negative feelings involved. You know she will let you express your feelings whenever you want at the end of the day.

Family ties evoke strong emotions, and some family members deliberately seek to use these feelings against one another. A sibling might, for instance, exploit your weakness to get you to do something you'd rather not do – even if that thing would cause you pain.

It's essential to recognize how manipulation also works within family dynamics so you can learn to respond effectively. Dark psychology techniques aren't only used by romantic partners, coworkers, or spouses.

Recognizing manipulative behavior within families can be particularly difficult when the manipulator is someone with some authority, such as a parent or older sibling. If you were raised to believe that you're supposed to do whatever your parents or siblings say no matter what, it might be hard to challenge or address that pattern in adulthood.

Here are some ways that family members might be manipulating you.

Invalidation of feelings

A family member who wants you to fulfill their desires might try to convince you that your feelings don't matter. They might invalidate your feelings by:

- dismissing your needs and concerns
- refusing to give you a chance to share your opinions or concerns
- interrupting or talking over you
- reprimanding you for making your feelings known
- dictating how you should feel

For example, you tell your mother you don't want to attend your aunt's birthday party because your childhood abuser would be present. She replies by saying you're selfish and reminds you that the situation happened a long time ago. "That was so long ago, and you won't even spend more than a few hours at the party. Why can't you just be polite?"

The continued attempts at persuading you to attend the birthday party invalidate your feelings of pain and distress, leaving you hurt at the lack of support from your parent.

Over time, invalidation can make you believe that your feelings are trivial and inconsequential. This belief will inadvertently extend to other relationship dynamics, making you vulnerable to potential manipulators.

Emotional blackmail

Family members use emotional blackmail to deliberately appeal to our feelings so that we can do what they want. This tactic often follows a pattern:

- the family member makes a demand
- If you say no, they pressure you into saying yes – this often involves the use of flattery or threats targeted at your emotions and sense of familial obligation.
- When you finally succumb to blackmail, they might shower you with kindness and affection.

Giving in usually makes them realize that they can get you to do anything they want with the right tactic. Don't be surprised if they don't hesitate to blackmail you in the future.

Guilt-tripping

A family member might use guilt to get you to assume responsibility for

something you didn’t do. Guilt makes you susceptible to manipulation. It makes you more likely to do what someone else wants and try to solve the problem for them.

Guilt isn’t always a negative emotion. It isn’t necessarily harmful to feel guilty when you’ve done something wrong or someone expresses that you’ve hurt them in a specific way. But when family members regularly use guilt to make you do what you’d rather not do, that’s indicative of manipulation.

Victimhood

Some parents manipulate their children by assuming the role of a victim. They might blame their kid for difficulties: “If I hadn’t had you, I know where my career would be now!” They also tend to downplay their faults and generally don’t do anything to help their situation.

You may observe that your mother likes to turn situations around to make it seem like you’re at fault: “If you hadn’t moved out, I wouldn’t have relapsed. It’s your fault that I’m an addict.”

A pattern of victimhood is called victim mentality, and it is marked by exaggeration of weaknesses and problems.

Withholding affection

Again, this is a popular tactic with narcissistic or psychopathic caregivers. They offer conditional love and affection – meaning that they’re only kind and caring towards you when you have something they want. But when you disappoint them or make a mistake, they may:

- criticize and reprimand you
- tell you they don’t love you
- blame you for the mistakes and failure

People who use this manipulation tactic also use isolation tactics such as:

- silent treatment
- implying no one else loves or cares about you
- threatening your siblings with isolation or punishment if they interact with you

Responding to Family Manipulation

Dealing with manipulation from family members can be stressful. When you aren't sure about the best way to handle the situation, you might choose to ignore it. While this may help avoid conflict, it doesn't stop the manipulation.

Below are some strategies to help you respond productively and protect your emotional health and wellbeing.

- **Call the manipulator out**

An excellent first step is to let the manipulator know that you're aware of their manipulative behavior. You might feel upset, trapped, or pressured – but don't forget that's how they want you to feel. Try breathing or grounding exercises to calm yourself down and relax when you feel like this.

You don't want to be confrontational, so use respectful language. Also, express yourself with "I" statements. In other words, don't be accusatory; instead, your feelings and thoughts calmly and straightforwardly.

An example of things to say is: "We had a deal, and I followed through on my part of the deal. I feel deceived and disrespected that you would go back on your word."

- **Set healthy boundaries and enforce them**

The purpose of a boundary is to outline your needs and the thing you will and won't tolerate. For example, you could tell the manipulator, "I need you to be honest in this relationship. If you keep going behind my back, I might have to limit our interactions to essential conversations only."

Boundaries are meant to protect you in any relationship. Don't let the other person guilt-trip you for "withholding" affection or punishing them. Establishing healthy boundaries lets you decide which behaviors to accept – before you find yourself in a potentially harmful situation.

If they want to remain in your life, people can choose to respect your boundaries and continue interacting in healthy and acceptable ways.

It also helps to set boundaries for yourself, especially if you tend to get involved with manipulative people. You can choose to leave when someone uses a specific tactic or decide only to meet them in the company of others.

Boundaries are excellent tools for curbing just how much you give out emotionally. This might mean you stop sharing personal life details with people you barely know.

- **Don’t isolate yourself**

Isolation increases your vulnerability to manipulation. It can be undeniably relieving when someone else understands and offers their support. It may not always be easy to talk about manipulation and abuse, but you should endeavor to discuss your situation with someone you trust – such as a family member, mentor, teacher, romantic partner, or therapist.

- **Build a support network**

Dysfunction in your family can make forming healthy relationships in adulthood incredibly difficult. It damages your self-esteem and negatively impacts your mental and emotional wellbeing.

You can reach out to a therapist or counselor specializing in family dynamics. This can help you address problematic behaviors within a family relationship and prevent long-term effects. A licensed therapist can help you deal with ongoing situations by:

- guiding you on how to set healthy boundaries
- helping to explore positive communication tactics
- teaching skills to cope with uncomfortable and distressing feelings
- helping you learn assertiveness

Addressing problematic and toxic behaviors within a manipulative family relationship dynamic can sometimes improve the situation. However, if it doesn’t, remind yourself that you can’t change people who don’t want to change.

It’s normal to feel a sense of duty toward your family, but you need to put your well-being first at the end of the day. If someone continues to hurt you, you aren’t obligated to maintain a relationship with them.

Sometimes, the healthiest way to overcome manipulation in any relationship is to loosen or snip whatever ties you have with the manipulator.

CONCLUSION

Congratulations, you made it to the end of this fantastic learning journey. Hopefully, it was all worth your while! If you made it to this part of the book, you have unraveled the concept of dark psychology and the art of manipulation.

The book dived head-on into personality psychology and its dark sides from the very beginning. You also learned about the manipulative aspects of psychology principles and techniques.

Consequently, you learned about the malevolent Dark Triad and how they subdue their victims with manipulation, gaslighting, and other dark psychology techniques. You also learned about the media's subliminal messages to achieve undue influence over the masses.

Without question, you have acquired the necessary knowledge to start protecting yourself and your loved ones from narcissists, psychopaths, Machiavellians, sadists, and other malicious personality types. Never forget that a person can only influence you to the extent you allow them. The power remains with you always!